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COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER #62

The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58: Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?

By Susan Reid, December 2010



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Special Working Papers Series

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Susan E Reid

**The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58:
Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?**

This paper was conceived in response to a question posed by historian György Péteri: can international exhibitions during the Cold War be seen as 'sites of convergence'? 'Convergence' implies a vector or unidirectional progression from difference to sameness, under the impact of a common state of advanced technology and common set of problems and experiences arising from it. Implicitly it references a shared modernity produced by industrial development or modernization.¹ Here I will use this question of convergence to frame a consideration of the USSR pavilion at the Brussels World Fair in 1958, focusing on debates about how best to represent the Soviet Union to the Cold War world.

The Brussels World Fair, which opened on 17 April 1958 and ran for six months, represented a 'significant episode in the cultural competition' of the Cold War, as Frederick C. Barghoorn, U.S. expert on Soviet affairs and consultant to the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) on its cultural programs, observed.² There, in microcosm, the two camps contested their claims for modernity. As the Belgian hosts envisaged it, the Brussels fair would engender dialogue, reconciliation and rapprochement between the two camps. But was it in fact a 'site of convergence' that fostered increasing sameness and if so, how and in what respects? Focusing on the Soviet pavilion, I will address here one of the aspects of international expositions: their cultural role as sites

¹ J. K. Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), esp. 391-402; Clark Kerr, John T. Dunlop, Frederick Harbison, and Charles A. Myers, *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960); Ramesh Mishra, 'Convergence Theory and Social Change: The Development of Welfare in Britain and the Soviet Union,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18, no. 1 (1976), 28-56 [Stable URL: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/178161>>]. I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust with whose support the research for this paper was conducted, and the AHRC for a Research Leave grant during which it was drafted. Thanks are due also to Sergei Zhuravlev; to György Péteri for setting the question of convergence in relation to international exhibitions of the Cold War period for the workshop 'Sites of Convergence: The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home,' Budapest, 28-30 May 2009; to Lewis Siegelbaum and other participants in that workshop for helpful discussion of the paper; to Anne Gorsuch for her insightful comments; and to Rika Devos.

² Frederick Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: the Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 87; David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 89.

of identity formation. Soviet self-representations and projections will be analyzed in tandem with perceptions and understandings of the systemic 'Other.'³ These identities are constituted through difference and dialogue, in the antithesis of the two world camps of communism and capitalism.

I'll state my hypothesis at the outset. First: in the Khrushchev-era Soviet Union some kind of 'convergence' with the West's symbols and cultural forms began to emerge within legitimate culture. Indeed, much of my work to date has been about questioning claims (from either side) for Soviet culture's absolute difference from the West and identifying similarities and common trends. These include the rapprochement, during the Thaw, with modernism in art, design and architecture, and the adoption, in the broader visual culture, of symbols of the good life more commonly seen as the prerogative of the West: shoe shopping, modern kitchens, happy housewives wielding labor-saving appliances, cozy family homes, and the transformation, beginning in the late 1950s, of the ideal identity of the new *Soviet Person* from producer to consumer. It is important to emphasize that I am talking about images here. But while representations should not be confused with realities, they nevertheless have effects; the representation of the happy housewife, for example, as a modern avatar of the new Soviet woman, does not automatically summon her into being, but it may change actual women's horizon of expectations and make this a legitimate persona for them to identify with.

Second: the Brussels universal exposition played a vital role in promoting appropriations and rapprochements of this sort in the culture of display and the iconography of progress, happiness and modernity. In what follows I shall demonstrate that Soviet exhibition professionals assimilated display modes and symbols more commonly identified with the capitalist West. In order to communicate with the West, a certain compromise or accommodation was required. The Soviet exhibition designers (or at least some of the institutions and individuals involved) considered it necessary to adopt, selectively, the idiom of the Cold War adversary if the USSR was to be heard and

³ This was one of the approaches suggested in Péteri's rationale for the workshop 'Sites of Convergence'. See his essay 'Sites of Convergence: The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home,' forthcoming in *Journal of Contemporary History*

understood in the way it wanted to be: to translate itself into a visual language the other could comprehend. In so doing, the conceptualization of the display for the Soviet pavilion internalized the image of the significant Other, America, as well as of the international but predominantly European viewing public.

What the paper is concerned with is the production of the Soviet 'self' during the planning and realization stage, rather than the public reception of the finished displays. I will look at some of the deliberations about the presentation of self in the 'back spaces' behind the scenes at the Brussels World Fair.⁴ The first World Fair of the Cold War era, Brussels was a formative stage in a learning process whereby Soviet image-makers shaped an image of the Soviet Union as a modern world power, which it continued to develop and disseminate both at home and abroad. The role such exercises in transcultural self-presentation played in the formation of a post-Stalinist Soviet identity, and their effects on specialist practice and theory back home are important questions that lie beyond the scope of the present paper. I propose, however, that, in the post-Stalinist climate of 'peaceful coexistence' and increased cultural exchange with the West, Brussels served as a training ground for Soviet display professionals. Supporting the arguments of modernizers who were lobbying for recognition of design as a specialism, stimulating a new breed of branding experts, informing their practice and discourse, and allowing or compelling Soviet professionals to measure themselves up against international standards, this and other international encounters with Western practice indirectly exercised effects on image production for domestic internal use too.⁵ The impressions which the approximately 10,000 Soviet tourists who visited Brussels '58 took home, how it changed their view of the world and of themselves, and how the

⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).

⁵ The exhibition *The Brussels Dream: the Czechoslovak Presence at Expo 58 in Brussels and the Lifestyle of the Early 1960s (Brusselsky sen)*, City Gallery, Prague, 2008, explored in part the impact of Brussels back home in Czechoslovakia on design and consumption in the form of the so called 'Brussels Style.' Lewis Siegelbaum looks at the way the Expo was represented to Soviet readers back home in 'The Representation of Technology and the Technology of Representation: The Soviet Pavilion at the Brussels Expo '58,' paper for workshop 'Sites of Convergence,' Budapest, May 2009 (revised for forthcoming publication as 'Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder' *Journal of Contemporary History*). On design professionals see Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,' *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (2006): 227-68; and (in regard to Soviet fashion stylists), Larissa Zakharova, 'Dior in Moscow: A Taste for Luxury in Soviet Fashion Under Khrushchev,' in David Crowley and Susan Reid, eds, *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 95-119.

lay public back home experienced the Expo vicariously through the Soviet media: these questions also have to be set aside.⁶

Brussels '58 was unavoidably framed in terms of the Cold War's systemic conflict and competition between the two camps. Although it was a *world* fair, attention focused on the confrontation and comparison between the U.S. and Soviet sectors. The Soviet planning team spelled out the Belgian organizers' intentions:

They set the question overtly that Brussels is an arena in which two worlds will struggle. They will strive to show what are the advantages of the capitalist order over the socialist. This idea is undoubtedly the main one for the organizers of the exhibition. If we take into account the events that took place at the end of last year [1956] and all the propaganda, this thesis is most serious and we must conduct real Bolshevik struggle at this exhibition, having undertaken it.⁷

The Cold War was a struggle of representations. It was a confrontation, but also a negotiation and accommodation between competing images of modernity and the good life, which were propagated by the 'two camps' of socialism and capitalism.⁸ The Soviet exhibition designers at Brussels shaped and presented the Soviet 'self' in dialogue with the USA's actual and, above all, imagined and anticipated self-projection there. This entailed not only an assertion of difference, but also an element of accommodation or 'critical assimilation'—Lenin's phrase—of aspects of the Cold War capitalist 'other's' symbols and approach to self promotion. Soviet participation at Brussels exemplified a wider shift to a more conciliatory and pragmatic approach to managing relations with Western culture.⁹ In regard to youth popular culture, for example, 'administrative measures' and prohibitions were recognized as counterproductive. Instead, the party called for Soviet production to enter into competition with Western imports for the

⁶ The figure is given by Barghoorn, *Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 81. I have discussed the impact of Soviet participation in the international art exhibitions at Brussels in Susan Reid, 'Toward a New (Socialist) Realism: The Re-Engagement with Western Modernism in the Khrushchev Thaw,' in R. Blakesley and S. Reid, eds, *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 217-39.

⁷ GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 162 (Stenographic report of meeting with General Commissar of Soviet section of 1958 World Fair, 11 May 1957).

⁸ David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, eds, *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (London: V&A, 2008).

⁹ Barghoorn, *Soviet Cultural Offensive*; David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 134; Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

hearts of young people, producing attractive equivalents so that they would voluntarily 'choose Soviet.'¹⁰

At the same time, a third term mediated the encounter between the two superpowers at Brussels. The Expo was a dialogue conducted on a world stage before an audience both sides courted, including not only the over 40 million visitors to the fair—predominantly but far from exclusively West European—but also a virtual global public who would participate in the exhibition via the media. Convergence, if such it was, was shaped both by the image of the other and by assumptions concerning the international public, including the developing world.

But whether 'convergence'—at least as the term came to be understood in association with 'convergence theory'— is the most useful model for understanding the mechanisms and nature of the changes under way should be interrogated as part of the project of breaking down the Cold War binaries that still shape histories of this period to this day. I will first examine some of the assumptions behind the concept of convergence, as it has come to be used, before analyzing more closely the process of engagement and the nature of the encounter and interactions that took place in the planning and production stages at Brussels. While 'convergence theory' focused on technology and industrial systems, my emphasis here is on cultural change, on images of consumption and the good life – happiness and prosperity—and the identification of modernity with the nuclear family, private life, and consumer society.

Convergence?

There are two main problems with 'convergence' as a description or explanation of changes in the nature of Soviet and American society, neither of which is necessarily

¹⁰ For example, a discussion in 1962 concerning measures to deal with the influence of bourgeois propaganda on Moscow University students (in light of increased number of foreign visitors, foreign trade and cultural exhibitions, increased penetration of VOA and BBC radio, foreign films, and tourism), suggested learning from the near abroad. In Poland propagandists had left young people's interest in 'ultramodern dance alone and the interest fell of its own accord...Official interference especially in the form of prohibition can just make things more difficult.' It was pointless, the report found, to try to forbid dancing 'in style' [*stil'nye*]. Administrative efforts to regulate such dances had no effect or rather would artificially arouse unhealthy interest in them among young people. The only way to overcome them was to create new and better Soviet dances and dance music and promote them in clubs, on TV and in film. This required better knowledge of young people's demands. TsAOPIM (Moscow Central Archive of Social and Political History) f. 4, op. 139, d. 54 (Protokol soveshchaniia sekretarei partiinoi organizatsii zemliachestv inostrannykh studentov, March 1962).

implicit in the term, but which accrued from the Cold War context in which it gained currency. The first is a criticism sometimes leveled at what was labeled 'convergence theory,' the notion of increasing similarity of the social structure of industrial societies. This charge concerns the deterministic, teleological nature of the model, which assumes a common destination, one that is determined by material conditions, especially by technology. The lines that converge lead inexorably towards a singular, homogeneous modernity.¹¹ Convergence theory implies that modernization in the areas of technology and economics inevitably produces common effects regardless of ideology or world system: a shared process of modernization results in a unified modernity. Urbanization, for example, inevitably produces certain social structures such as an emphasis on the nuclear family and a psychological need for privacy.¹²

World fairs, since their inception, had been dedicated to celebrating and promoting industrial and technological progress and to accelerating the process of technology transfer. According to the model above, they were thus also vectors of convergence: agents of a common process of modernization, spreading a particular form of modernity, bringing societies closer together, and making them more similar. There is much evidence to support this narrative, to which, on balance, this essay adds. But the task here is to scrutinize the processes, mechanisms, media, visual and spatial forms, and individual and institutional agencies, which collectively mediated transfer. Thereby we can avoid the image of some kind of inevitable osmosis and the determinism of which convergence theory has been accused. This will also help us to consider whether apparently similar forms had identical meanings when they crossed the Cold War divide: that is, whether adoption of the other's idiom and rhetoric implied or 'led to' ideological convergence.

¹¹ Galbraith, *New Industrial State*, 4-6; 'Convergence: The Uncertain Meeting of East and West,' *Time* (12 Jan. 1970): <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,942145-1,00.html>>; Mishra, 'Convergence Theory'; Michael David-Fox, 'Multiple Modernities vs Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54 (2006): 535-55.

¹² E.g. Kent Geiger in 1960 presented transformations in the Soviet family as a version of the wider changes in advanced industrial societies under the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and the growing role of the state, in short of modernization. Kent Geiger, 'The Family and Social Change,' in Cyril Black, ed., *The Transformation of Russian Society: Aspects of Social Change since 1861* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 452 of 447-59. 'Ideology is not the relevant force,' according to Galbraith, *New Industrial State*, 393.

A useful modification of this convergence model in relation to international exhibitions could be to see them as 'convergence zones' in the sense in which the term is used in physical geography to refer to a location where airflows or ocean currents meet. Its usefulness as a metaphor is that it focuses attention on the turbulence that marks a convergence zone and on the variety of wave phenomena that may arise there—interference, diffraction, refraction, resonance—although using a metaphor from the natural world also risks implying that effects are natural and unmediated. I am interested precisely in this turbulence arising at the point where two currents mingle, and in the various ways in which they may absorb, diffract, or repulse each other's energy: the vortexes and doldrums at the meeting of the two world systems. International exhibitions were not only sites of diffusion and transfer. They were also sites of negotiation and contestation.¹³ Perhaps, then, we might imagine the Brussels World Fair as a kind of ripple tank: a contained, controlled environment within which the effects of these currents meeting may be observed in microcosm.

When the Cold War entered the more relaxed phase of 'peaceful coexistence' in the Khrushchev era, Soviet elites and professionals were divided in their view of the possibilities and legitimacy of the convergence zone, as in regard to many other things (with the notable exception of architecture, where Khrushchev set a decisive line in 1954), along a spectrum from xenophobic to cautiously internationalist, from Stalinist to reformist, etc.¹⁴ While, for some, close encounters with the culture of the Cold War adversary represented the threat of contagion and debilitating erosion of integrity, for others, who might be called modernizers or westernizers, they were more like an inoculation, a brush with infection that tempers the organism, and a source of useful techniques and forms to strengthen the Soviet 'arsenal'. Both ends of the spectrum could find legitimating support in Lenin's dicta. On the one hand, 'the only choice is either bourgeois or socialist ideology; there is no middle course.'¹⁵ On the other, Lenin's doctrine of 'critical assimilation' of the achievements of bourgeois society was invoked

¹³ Péteri, rationale for 'Sites of Convergence'; and Péteri, 'Sites of Convergence' *Journal of Contemporary History*, forthcoming

¹⁴ E.g. on splits in the art world, including the representation of Soviet art at Brussels '58, see Reid, 'Toward a New (Socialist) Realism,' 217-39. On peaceful coexistence: Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 184.

¹⁵ V. I. Lenin, cited in 'Convergence: The Uncertain Meeting of East and West.'

in support of rapprochement with selected aspects of twentieth-century Western cultural developments.¹⁶ This position posited the possibility of separation of technique from ideology.

The official Soviet line remained insistent that although the reduction of international tension might allow for greater exchange, cooperation and cultural dialogue, it in no way heralded an ideological softening towards the West. Peaceful coexistence in the realm of ideas and culture remained unthinkable. On the contrary, the new conditions of increased contact and information flow required the intensification of vigilance against any erosion of cultural distinction and ideological purity. Former *Pravda* editor Georgii A. Zhukov, a key player in the organization of the Soviet section at Brussels, expressed this vividly: 'The peaceful co-existence of ideas is as nonsensical as fried snowballs.'¹⁷ However, such protestations of systemic irreconcilability were often accompanied by a more pragmatic, accommodating approach in practice, including by Zhukov himself. As chair of the State Committee for Cultural Links with Foreign Countries (SCCLFC, 1957-67), which was established under the Council of Ministers on 4 March 1957,¹⁸ Zhukov was closely involved in international cultural programs—including Soviet participation in the Brussels fair—a role whose importance grew enormously with the shift of emphasis towards 'soft', peaceful means of waging the Cold War, including economic relations, cultural diplomacy and competition for world influence.

¹⁶ V. I. Lenin, 'The Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government,' *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 70.

¹⁷ G. A. Zhukov, 'Cultural Relations and Peaceful Co-Existence,' *Anglo-Soviet Journal* 22, no. 2 (1961): 21. Similarly, Moscow Artists' Union secretary Dmitrii Shmarinov declared, 'Contemporaneity, now as never before in history, is antagonistic and both sides possess quite different means of expressing their own ideology.' D. Shmarinov, interview, *Moskovskii khudozhnik*, 15 December 1958, no. 22. See also D. Zaslavskii, *Pravda* (7 November 1959), cited in A. Werth, *Russia under Khrushchev* (Fawcett: Greenwich, CT, 1975), 229.

¹⁸ The SCCLFC (Komitet po kul'turnym sviaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami pri sovete Ministrov SSSR, 1957-67, GARF fond 9518), was an all-Union organ charged with leading cultural cooperation with foreign countries and coordinating the activities of ministries and organizations. Barghoorn argued that its advent in 1957 along with the disbanding of VOKS (established 1925) in February 1958 demonstrated the increased importance the Khrushchev regime placed on cultural relations and cultural diplomacy as an aspect of Soviet foreign policy. Barghoorn, *Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 159-60; Nigel Gould-Davies, 'The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy,' *Diplomatic History* 27 (Fall 2003): 193-4; Rósa Magnúsdóttir, 'Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes Toward the United States of America, 1945-1959,' (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 129-34, 155-56. On VOKS see Michael David-Fox, 'The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The "Cultured West" through Soviet Eyes,' *Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003): 300-35.

Convergence or Conversion? Catching up and overtaking America

This brings us to the second problem with the way convergence is sometimes envisaged. The geometric image of convergence would seem to imply a mutual process of compromise and accommodation. Thus the USA might become more like the Soviet Union, at the same time as the latter might become more similar to the former. For example, capitalism would be modified by greater state regulation and social security, while socialism would take on market correctives, and they would meet somewhere in the middle—perhaps around Belgrade.¹⁹ The result would be such hybrids as market socialism or welfare capitalism or, in terms of culture, such mongrel forms as ‘socialist modernism’ or ‘capitalist realism’: concepts that many at the time (and to this day) would consider heretical oxymorons. There is evidence for both of these scenarios. The USIA’s ‘People’s Capitalism’ campaign adopted in the mid-fifties, which underpinned the U.S. exhibit at Brussels, espoused values identified with socialism, while economic reforms discussed across the socialist bloc proposed a degree of market corrective to the plan. Fears of such an erosion of difference lay behind hostility, on both sides, towards ideas of convergence.²⁰

Behind much discussion of convergence in the West, however, is a tacit understanding that what we are talking about is not a *mutual* process of convergence equally from both sides (both systems) upon a median point. What is at issue is not convergence but *conversion* or westernization, specifically, the conversion of the Soviet Union to capitalism. Convergence, in this case, is conceived as a process whereby the Soviet Union is ‘normalized’ to become more like the USA. Thus, it reconfirms the paradigmatic status of capitalist modernity as a norm to which socialist ‘modernity’ should—and would—gradually approximate. It is important to emphasize that those

¹⁹ ‘Convergence: The Uncertain Meeting’; Galbraith, *New Industrial State*.

²⁰ National Archive Record Administration, College Park, MD (NARA) Record Group 306, Entry 1011, Box 1 (henceforth NARA 306/1011/1, etc.) (USIA report, ‘West European Attitudes Related to the People’s Capitalism Campaign,’ 31 Dec. 1956). On the People’s Capitalism campaign: Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 133-41, 145; Amanda W. Aucoin, ‘Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange and American Information Activity during the Khrushchev Years’ (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2001). For ‘market socialism’ see e.g. Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy* (London: Longman, 2003), 101-103. Czech economist Ota Šik’s concept of socialist market relations originated in 1957-58: H. G. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-25.

labeled 'convergence theorists' were not hawks, but on the contrary, were seen by some as too soft on the Soviet system for analyzing it in terms that seemed to accord it legitimacy as a transformable political system. In its unconscious premises, however, the convergence model, in some cases, reinforces a hegemonic model of modernity that identifies it with a particular, north-western form of consumer society and which positions socialist modernity as not really 'modernity' at all.²¹

The Soviet Union did become a consumer society of sorts.²² Brussels and other exhibitions arguably played a role in this process, and the representation of consumption and modernity is core to my exploration of 'convergence' there. The images I consider as symptoms (and vectors) of 'convergence' are associated with consumption and individual 'private' life: family home-based leisure, happy housewives in modern kitchens saturated with 'labor-saving' technology, or cars parked outside a bucolic private home and garden. These had become established as emblems of the American consumerist way of life by 1958. They were central to America's self-projection both at home and abroad, for example, in the USIA magazine *Amerika*, or in Charles and Ray Eames' *Glimpses of the USA* shown at Brussels, consisting of over 2,200 still and moving images representing a typical work day in the US, its rhetoric of superabundance reinforced by the sensory overload of being projected simultaneously on seven 20 x 30 foot screens.²³ But if the USSR adopted or appropriated such imagery, along with the spectacular, image-based approach to exhibiting itself abroad, as argued

²¹ E.g. Talcott Parsons wrote in 1960 of 'an almost world-wide consensus on the evaluation of high industrial-level, economic productivity... Essentially it means the general acceptance of the industrial models of Western society as providing at least *one* essential part of the "good society."' Talcott Parsons, 'Some Principal Characteristics of Industrial Societies,' in Black, ed., *Transformation of Russian Society*, 21 (emphasis in original). The Cold War 'encompassed crucial agreements and disagreements about economics,' and the principal Cold War adversaries agreed that economic performance was a defining element of modern life and an important measure of national success, but as David Engerman notes, this analysis glosses over the differences both in forms of organization – planning versus market – and in economic priorities. Thus Parsons conflated industrial societies with 'the West' and 'slips quickly from a discussion of production ("industrial-level economic productivity") to consumption ("good society").' David Engerman, 'The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War,' *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004). See also Raymond Aron, *The Industrial Society: Three Essays on ideology and Development* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); David-Fox, 'Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism,' 535-55.

²² For argumentation see Susan E. Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and Consumption in the Khrushchev Thaw,' *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 211-52; Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern,' 227-68.

²³ Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2007); on distribution of *Amerika* see Richmond, *Cultural Exchange*, 148-51.

below, necessarily mean the Soviet Union bought the American system and values as a package and became an identical consumer society?

According to the model of inevitable normalization, international fairs, 'tended to reveal that the attempt by the state-socialist project to create an alternative civilization to capitalism had been a pathetic failure.'²⁴ A related claim is made by Victoria de Grazia regarding the encounter between the Soviet public and *Amerika* at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959: that it left the Soviet Union's different modernity 'in the dust.'²⁵ The collapse of the project of an alternative, socialist modernity thirty years later was far from self-evident in 1958 or 1959, however. On the contrary, rapid economic growth combined with the recent triumph of Sputnik aroused fears of just the opposite, convincing not only Khrushchev but many in the West that the USSR could soon outstrip the United States.²⁶ Soviet confidence rode high, escalated – along with American anxieties—by the success of the Eastern Bloc pavilions at Brussels, which outdid the USA in popular reception.²⁷ The role international exhibitions may have played in undermining Soviet difference and legitimacy needs to be closely examined on the basis of historical evidence, not prejudged; the collapse of Soviet socialism was not an inevitable Darwinian process of survival of the fittest determined either by some inherent superior adaptation of capitalism, by technological determinism, or anything else.

Nevertheless, socialist leaders themselves came dangerously close to condoning an asymmetrical model of convergence in the late 1950s, with their reinvigoration of

²⁴ Péteri, rationale for 'Sites of Convergence'.

²⁵ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 456. For fuller critique see Susan Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom?" Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 855-904. See also Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and review by Ronald Grigor Suny *Russian Review* 61, no 2 (2002) 327-8. According to Suny, in Kotkin's universe there is no alternative to liberal modernity.

²⁶ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and his Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 365. On Soviet confidence: U.S. Ambassador William Lacy, transcript of tape recording concerning Moscow fair (White House, January 1959), NARA 306/1050/7.

²⁷ On the low impact of U.S. pavilions at Brussels and other international exhibitions as compared to those of communist countries (including China) see USIA Office of Research and Intelligence, 'Visitor Reaction to the U.S. Exhibit at the Paris Trade Fair, 1956,' 27 July 1956, NARA 306/1011/1; 'Highlights of USIA Research on the Presidential Trade Fair Program, 1959,' NARA 306/1011/1; 'Visitor Reaction to the U.S. vs major competing exhibits at the Brussels International Fair,' NARA 306/1011/1; 'Follow-up study of visitor reaction to the U.S. versus major competing exhibits at the Brussels International Fair' (June 1959), NARA 306/1011/2.

the old slogan that had stimulated the earlier wave of intensive industrialization of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, 'to catch up and surpass America.' The state socialist modernization project was marked by contradiction, as Péteri has argued: it tried to create a form of modern civilization that was distinct from capitalism; yet at the same time 'it accepted the economic and technological models and standards of success prevailing in the advanced core area of the global system', that is, Western modernity.²⁸ The commitment made by socialist regimes to catch up and overtake America locked them into a double bind; it meant entering into competition directly on America's terms, implicitly adopting its benchmarks of progress, including its living standards and consumption levels.²⁹

The core dilemma—at the time, and for historians—is this: if the USSR adopted some of the West's economic benchmarks of success, does it necessarily follow that it lost its systemic identity, defined by difference from the West? Did the adoption of elements of the West's iconography of modernity imply adoption of its value system and meanings, and erosion of ideological distinction? Did key terms—abundance, freedom, humanism, the good life—come to mean the same things, or was their referent still distinct?

To stake claims for Soviet socialist modernity, in competition with capitalist modernity, was the main thrust of Soviet participation at Brussels. This modernity was not limited to individual consumption of goods but allotted an important place, in achieving high living standards and the self-realization of each and all, to benefits, healthcare, education, services and collective consumption. Rather than assume that this project was necessarily doomed to failure and that contact 'led to' contagion and, ultimately, conversion and collapse, let us entertain an alternative model, closer to the way those elements in the Soviet leadership and professional elites at the time that favored increasing engagement with the West would have imagined the course they

²⁸ György Péteri, 'Nylon Curtain - Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe,' *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (November 2004), 114.

²⁹ Zsuzsanna Varga, 'Questioning the Soviet Economic Model in the 1960s,' in János M. Rainer and György Péteri, eds, *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary* (Trondheim: Programme on East European Cultures and Societies, 2005), 110. Katherine Pence has noted a similar perception in regard to the GDR's relations with West Germany. Katherine Pence, 'Cold War Iceboxes: Competing Visions of Kitchen Politics in 1950s Divided Germany,' unpublished paper for workshop, 'Kitchen Politics in the Cold War,' Munich, July 2005.

negotiated between Scylla and Charybdis. For we should not underestimate the Marxist regime's conviction— shared by many professionals who worked for it— of the historical superiority and ultimate supremacy of socialism. If aspects of the West's technology, display techniques and iconography were 'critically assimilated,' then it was to manage change, strengthen the socialist system, and hasten its victory by standing on the shoulders of the West.³⁰ If, in the long run, this facilitated the erosion of difference – a possibility I do not rule out – that does not mean that this was predetermined in the moment of encounter with, and fertilization or infection by the West. Nor is that encounter a sole and sufficient cause.

Expos as 'contact zones' and sites of hybridization

While the 'convergence zone' image has some uses, I'd like to suggest an alternative spatial model that draws less on geometry or environmental determinism and more on culture, especially language. This is Mary Pratt's notion of the 'contact zone.' Since what I am addressing is a matter of representations and cultural communication, this model, developed for postcolonial analysis of cultural exchange, seems more apt and helps to avoid the determinism of which the convergence model has been accused.

In her 1992 book on travel writing, *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines 'contact zones' as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.'³¹ The idea of the 'contact zone' places greater emphasis on the cultural transfer, or what Pratt calls 'transculturation'—that goes on in spaces where different cultures, nations and languages previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures meet.

³⁰ Similarly, the economic reforms proposed by Evsei Liberman, Ota Šik and others to expand the use of market forces and profitability as correctives to central planning were intended as solutions to the chronic crisis of planning, and were meant to strengthen the socialist economy not to undermine it. Terms such as 'market socialism' or 'socialist market relations' had to be avoided as they remained heretical. Hanson, *Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, 101-103; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, 119-25; Abraham Katz, *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), chap. 5.

³¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel-Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge 1992), 4. An exhibition or museum collection may also be viewed in this way: James Clifford, 'Museums as Contact Zones,' *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188-219.

Transculturation is a term used by ethnographers to describe how subordinate or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture: a form of appropriation and bricolage. It assumes that although subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, what they use it for, and how.³²



"USSR (left) and USA (right) pavilions at Brussels '58." Postcard.

One advantage of this model is that it envisages multiple connections and cross-fertilizations, foregrounding the 'interactive improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters' rather than a single geometry or unidirectional vector, and that it does not prejudge the answer as to the nature of the effects of contact. Furthermore, it emphasizes that the outcomes of convergence may be new hybrids, cultural products that are not identical to either of the elements that meet in the contact zone: creole languages, for example, that are not the same as the 'imperial' language but which enable communication. The 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are

³² Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6 and note 4.

constituted in and by their relations to each other.’³³ It is also a productive model because, even in the colonial context of the encounter between metropolitan and subaltern cultures, influence is not seen as unidirectional; the culture of the center is also changed by interaction with that of the periphery.

Pratt uses the idea of the contact zone and transculturation to examine colonial contexts in which the relations of power are asymmetrical, but this asymmetry is not essential to the model’s usefulness. Although at the Cold War Expo we are dealing with the encounter between two sovereign states, advanced industrial and nuclear armed superpowers (even if one had a prior claim on modernity to which the other tried to catch up to) and not with colonizers and colonized, subjugators and subaltern, the emphasis on reciprocity is fruitful, I believe, for a study of the *mutual* effects of close encounters of a Brussels kind. Given that the USIA was painfully aware by 1957 that socialist bloc countries were outdoing the USA in audience reception at international exhibitions,³⁴ it is also worth asking what American exhibition designers and USIA propagandists appropriated from Soviet or socialist bloc practice and rhetoric, and examining the ways in which Cold War competition with and fears of the Soviet Union shaped the American ‘self’. As Pratt notes, the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, but ‘it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery [read socialist East] determines the metropolis [read capitalist West]—beginning, perhaps, with the latter’s obsessive need to present and re-present its periphery and its others continually to itself.’³⁵

At risk of losing sight of this essential reciprocity, my focus in the remainder of this paper is on one side of the process. We will turn now to the way the Soviet self was shaped at Brussels in dialogue with the imagined other, in a mixture of negotiation, accommodation and resistance that resulted in syncretism, intertextuality, and a hybridization or creolization of its own language of representation.

³³ Ibid, 6-7; Clifford, ‘Museums as Contact Zones,’ 192.

³⁴ NARA 306/1011/boxes 1 and 2 (see note 27).

³⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

Brussels 1958

The Soviet Union formally accepted the invitation to participate in the Brussels fair by a Council of Ministers decree of 6 June 1956, less than two years before it was to open.³⁶

Not surprisingly, it was seen as an occasion for ideological struggle:

The World Fair in Brussels is not an ordinary industrial or trade exhibition such as Leipzig but will be an exhibition where each country, in the area assigned to it, will demonstrate and propagandize its way of life and this exhibition is thus a site of struggle between the ideas of two worlds, capitalist and socialist.³⁷

As Central Committee secretary Dmitrii Shepilov confirmed in 1957, with nearly fifty states participating and a projected 35-50 million viewers in addition to the chance for year-long, Europe-wide publicity accompanying it, Brussels provided an unprecedented and unmissable opportunity to propagandize openly the superiority of socialism and to demonstrate the achievements of the Soviet Union.³⁸

A number of state committees, departments and ministries were involved in preparations for this major propaganda campaign. Shepilov's involvement was probably to do with his experience in the Central Committee's Bureau of Propaganda and Agitation in the post-war period and his role as Minister of Foreign Affairs (June 1956-February 1957). The overall planning of the exhibition fell to two organizations: the All-Union Chamber of Commerce under M. V. Nesterov, and the SCCLFC headed by Zhukov. In addition, Mikhail Suslov's Cultural Department of the Party Central Committee, the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade, and the USSR Ministry of Culture were closely involved, along with numerous other ministries responsible for delivering particular exhibits. Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Ryzhkov, formerly first Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Machine Tool Production and Automation, was appointed General Commissar of the Soviet section and a 29-person Exhibition Directorate was set up to deal with the

³⁶ GARF f. 9470 (Materialy sovetskoi sekti Vsemirnoi vystavki 1958 goda v Briussele), op. 1, d. 22 (USSR Council of Ministers Decree, 6 June 1956).

³⁷ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, l. 127 (n.d.)

³⁸ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 41-42; d. 27, l. 127. Head of the Soviet Information Bureau and Deputy to the General Commissar of the Soviet section, Iakov A. Lomko emphasized that the Expo 'presents us with opportunities for propaganda such as we have surely never had in the post-war period in Europe.' GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, l. 159-60; d. 21, l. 205. On Shepilov see Stephen V. Bittner, ed., *Dmitrii Shepilov, The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, transl. Anthony Austin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

construction of the pavilion and preparation of exhibits.³⁹ There appears to have been a lack of coordinated direction especially in the early stages, and the cogs were already grinding in the grooves of established practice and inertia by the time that Zhukov became closely involved.⁴⁰

These overlapping bureaucracies and institutions did not see eye to eye about the means or ends of the exhibition. Zhukov's and Nesterov's organizations had differing conceptions of the nature of the opportunity Brussels provided and of how best to set out the Soviet stall. The former, more concerned with ideological influence and cultural offensive, was insistent that it was not a trade fair but an exhibition of competing ideologies and ways of life and that it must take account of the Western viewer. The latter was oriented more towards using it for developing trade links and appears to have been steeped in entrenched practices whose venerable origins went back to late nineteenth-century trade fairs.⁴¹ In the autumn of 1957, with deadlines already pressing, Zhukov expended much effort on trying to get various Central Committee secretaries—Suslov, Anastas Mikoyan, and Petr Pospelov—to take an interest in the detail of the exhibition plan and to support him in his differences with the Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Trade, and also roped in prominent cultural figures, public activists and journalists.⁴² A change in the approach may also have taken place once Khrushchev was confirmed in power after the ouster of the 'anti-party group' in June 1957. But by that time there was less than a year to go before the opening of the Fair, and although some changes appear to have been made—notably the inclusion of the model of Sputnik—only compromises and amendments to details and individual displays, rather than fundamental shifts of emphasis and approach were still possible.⁴³

The Soviet display was shaped in part by the bureaucratic cultures and received practices of the organizing institutions, and by the contradictions between them. In addition to these domestic conflicts there were four immediate determinants on the way the Soviet Union presented itself to the world at Brussels, which will be discussed

³⁹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3; GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21.

⁴⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 205.

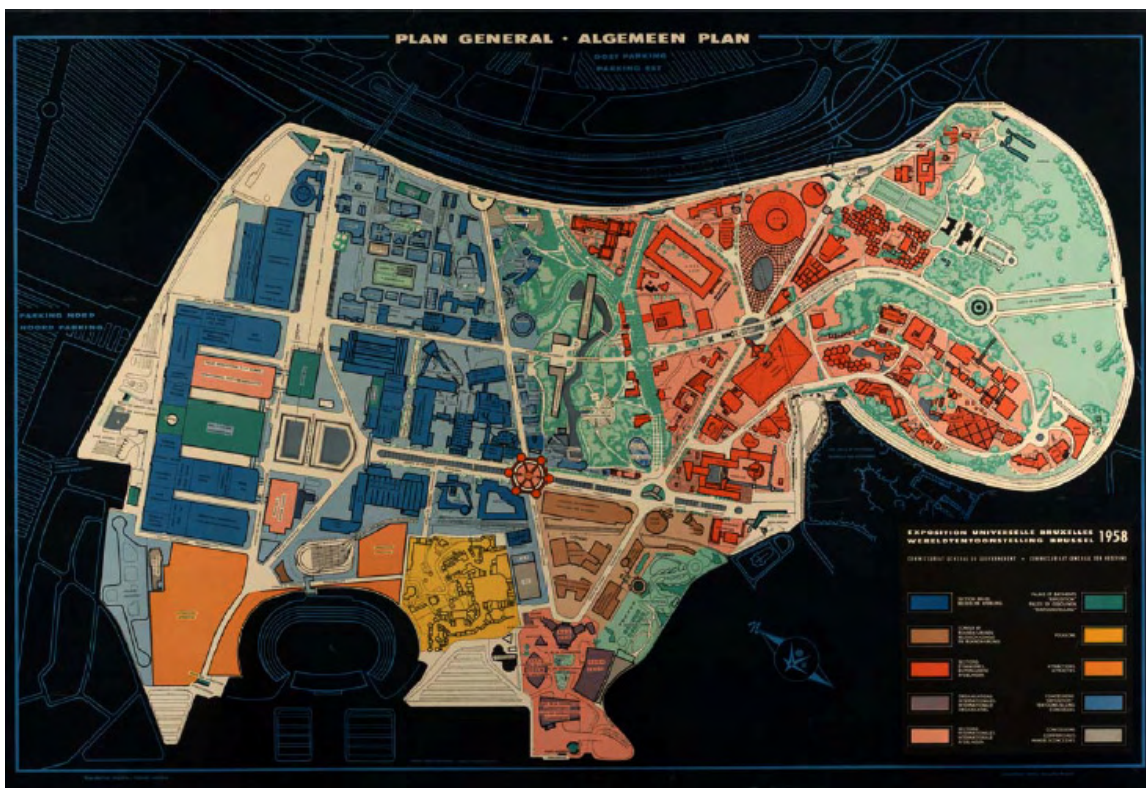
⁴¹ GARF f. 9518 (fond of SCCLFC) op. 1, d. 588, l. 27 (Perepiska s ministerstvami i drugimi uchrezhdeniiami SSSR ob organizatsii Sovetskogo pavil'ona na Vsemirnoi vystavke v Bruiussele).

⁴² Ibid, ll. 26-29, ll. 36-44.

⁴³ On the inclusion of the Sputnik model see Siegelbaum, 'Representation of Technology.'

here: i. the symbolic geometry of the exposition territory as established by the Belgian Expo committee; ii. the real and imagined ways that its neighbor the USA would present itself; iii. the umbrella theme, a new humanism, also set by the Belgian hosts, to which all participants were obliged to refer; and iv. the anticipated viewer.

i. Geometries of the World Fair



'General Plan of Expo '58'

Collection of Dept. Architecture & Urban Planning, Ghent University

Whatever qualms one should have about imposing the convergence model retrospectively onto the complexities of interactions and negotiations at Brussels, convergence was a configuration the individual participating nations could not avoid. It was thrust on them at the time by the symbolic geometry of the plan. The Belgian exhibition committee sought to engineer the superpowers into peaceful coexistence and cooperation by corralling the USA and USSR into close proximity in the same triangular

site.⁴⁴ The USA and Soviet Union found themselves caught between converging lines. The apex of the triangular lot they shared was indicated by the proboscis of the French pavilion pointing like a great wand as if convergence might thus be conjured into being. Even had the wider international context of Cold War and peaceful competition not done so, the location of the Soviet and American pavilions compelled the designers to take account of each other and to anticipate the comparisons visitors would inevitably draw.

The Soviet exhibition organizers were fully cognizant of the opportunities and challenges this geometry presented, and of its implications for the future public reception, and they took the relative position of the national pavilions into account from the outset. In an early (undated, probably 1956) report setting out the principles and main premises of the Soviet section, Ryzhkov emphasized 'that the USSR pavilion and those of the People's Democracies will be located at the exposition between the pavilions of USA, Canada and France. This creates particular conditions for juxtaposition of the results of competition between socialist and capitalist systems.'⁴⁵ A secret memo to the CPSU Central Committee from Zhukov and Ryzhkov, dated 4 May 1957, noted that although officially Brussels was defined as a universal exposition, the pronouncements of general commissars of capitalist sections made clear that the efforts of all the Western pavilions would lie in the realm of ideology, values, and meanings; they aimed to show 'not what they *produce*, but what they *represent*.'⁴⁶ The USA had made no secret of the fact that they would 'demonstrate the superiority of the American way of life.' Howard Cullman, General Commissar of the U.S. pavilion, declared (in terms similar to Shepilov's statement) that 'millions of visitors will compare the USA and USSR,' and that the exhibition 'provides us and our friends in the free world with an unprecedented opportunity to show as vividly as possible our ideology, way of life and hopes for the future. [...] The free nations must make use of every possibility they have at their

⁴⁴ Robert Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 95. Baron Moens de Fernig declared: 'People of my generation who have lived through two world wars and who have suffered, have dreamt since childhood of a more fraternal and mutually cooperative humanity. What a joy it would be for all if through the 1958 exposition we could create this new international atmosphere.' GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 1, l. 6. To view an online version of the exhibit, please see: <<http://www.atomium.be/#/virtual58.aspx>>

⁴⁵ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, l. 13 (Tezisy soobshcheniia Gen. Komissara sovetskoi sektsii o Vsemirnoi vystavke [n.d., c 1956]).

⁴⁶ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 14; l. 27. (Emphasis added.)

disposal to underline the meaning of the freedom they possess.' Head of the USIA Arthur Larson had put this bullishly, Zhukov and Ryzhkov reported: 'For us the most important thing is to continue to defend our cause, to fight against the communists.'⁴⁷ As the Soviet officials presented it, the decision to use the Expo to engage in ideological battle for the socialist way of life was forced upon them by the adversary.

We should be careful not to reduce the confrontation to America v. Russia, however. The Belgian government-appointed organizers of the World Fair actively courted the USA's participation explicitly to secure symbolic victory for capitalism in the Cold War.⁴⁸ Not only did it take place on West European (Belgian) turf, but the battle for Europe, and the nested Cold Wars being waged within Western nations were also fought out here. Zhukov and Ryzhkov noted that the reformist trade unions of Belgium were constructing their own pavilion, *Germinal*, proclaiming: "the theme of our pavilion is man and socialism. It will not only remind about the past but also illustrate our achievements, hopes, and our faith in the solution that socialism represents. ... *Germinal* will thus be the center of the socialist workers' movement at the exhibition."⁴⁹

The allocation of plots as they stood in the early stage of planning in 1956 was analyzed by Andrei Boretskii, one of the architects of the Soviet pavilion. Its closest neighbors were Bulgaria and Hungary to the North-East, Czechoslovakia to the North-West; on the West, Romania and Canada; to the South, Poland; on the South-East – France; to the North-East as an immediate neighbor, the USA; and penetrating this circular site like a wedge, the Vatican.⁵⁰ Looking into the ripple tank we might identify at least three possible approaches toward negotiating this spatial arrangement, the anticipated design of the American pavilion, and the displays that would be mounted inside it. An opposing current could be confronted with a big splash, but it might also be

⁴⁷ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 199 (report by Ryzhkov to meeting about Brussels, 3 Oct. 1957); GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 14-15; Publicity brochure from Office of the U.S. Commissioner General, 'The United States Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair, 1958' (n.d.), NARA 306/1011/1.

⁴⁸ The U.S. organizers reported that the Belgian Government 'is relying on the U.S. to offset the expected large-scale participation of the Soviet bloc countries... The Belgians look to and expect U.S. participation to make the Exhibition truly a "World Fair" and to insure its success as a demonstration of Free World progress.' NARA 306/71 A2101/159: 'US Participation in Brussels "World Fair" – 1958', p. 2. (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁹ GARF f. 9518, op 1, d. 588, ll.14-15 (report to Central Committee, May 1957).

⁵⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 39-40 (Boretskii).

absorbed and its energy co-opted, or it might just be circumvented. All three approaches were adopted by the Soviet organizers. Here we are concerned primarily with the syncretic ways in which Soviet image-makers appropriated and adapted an iconography and mode of address more usually identified with Western modernity. But we should acknowledge briefly that assimilation coexisted with other approaches.

The Soviet Union sought to take control of its environment and to counteract the presence of America on its doorstep by gathering the European socialist countries to itself as a buffer. In addition to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania all intended to participate and developed projects for their pavilions, and they had been assigned plots in the same region of the exhibition. In the symbolic geography of the Expo, as in 'real' geopolitics, the USSR tried to consolidate a socialist bloc of which it was the natural leader.⁵¹ The USA would thus find itself isolated in its single pavilion located between the Vatican and Soviet Union (or 'between heaven and hell,' as one American quipped).⁵² In September 1956 Ryzhkov and Nesterov (USSR Chamber of Commerce) reported to the government on a visit they had made to Prague 16-17 July 1956, and on an ensuing meeting of General Commissars and architects of the People's Democracies to discuss their exhibition plans and designs for their pavilions. At the meeting, held in Moscow in the USSR Chamber of Commerce 20-22 August 1956, discussion addressed 'measures to create, at the exhibition, a common architectural ensemble of pavilions of the socialist countries since they are positioned close to one another; the construction of pavilions; and an exchange of views on each country's thematic-exposition plans.'⁵³

These efforts to coordinate the pavilion designs into a unified ensemble presenting a homogeneous socialist-zone visual identity to the world came to little. Not only did several of these countries withdraw from the Expo because the costs were

⁵¹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 197 (report by Ryzhkov to meeting about Brussels, 3 Oct. 1957).

⁵² Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 143.

⁵³ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 20-40 (Meeting of General Commissars and Architects), and ll. 133-4 (Report to CC CPSU, USSR Council of Ministers and Ministry of Foreign Trade from Ryzhkov and M. V. Nesterov (chair of Chamber of Commerce) about visit to Prague and Brussels, Sept. 1956) (meeting of General Commissars and architects of state expositions, 16-17 July 1956); GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 25, l. 5; d. 4, ll. 12-14 (Protocol of information meeting of representatives of Soviet Union and countries of the People's Democracies participating in the Universal Exposition in Brussels, 20-22 August 1956.)

prohibitive,⁵⁴ but the socialist pavilions that were realized—Hungary and Czechoslovakia—were remarkable less for their compliance than for their independence. The absence of stylistic unity among the socialist pavilions, failing to proclaim a common face and identifiable socialist style of modernity as the Soviet organizers had wished, spoke rather of ‘different roads to socialism.’ The Czechoslovak pavilion, in particular, ceded nothing in terms of modernity, high quality innovative design, playfulness and fantasy to the Western pavilions and confounded Western stereotypes of the Eastern bloc as grey, stodgy, and faceless. As much as anything, it may have been its difference from the Soviet one that accounted for the warm reception accorded the Czechoslovak pavilion, which outdid capitalist countries including the USA in popularity with the viewing public.⁵⁵ Thus, more in spite of than thanks to the Soviet attempts at consolidation, the Czechoslovak pavilion did sterling service for the socialist bloc in West European eyes. Its independence went some way toward mitigating the bad press the Soviet Union had received in the West in 1956 for its imperious behavior towards its satellites.

Apart from the proximity of the two superpower pavilions, their size also pitched them in direct competition against each other. The area of their sectors was roughly equal and they stood out as two of the four largest national pavilions in the whole fair.⁵⁶ Size mattered; it sent out a message that America and Russia were two equal but opposing world powers. To proclaim this new parity—the Soviet Union’s newly attained global status as leader of one of the two world camps—was one of the reasons that it was keen to engage in international exhibitions in the late 1950s, despite the costs and the risks of ideological contamination and of an escalation of expectations at home.⁵⁷ The similarities between the U.S. and USSR pavilions, as built—in area and in their

⁵⁴ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 196; d. 3, l. 113 (10 May 1957).

⁵⁵ ‘Highlights of USIA Research on the Presidential Trade Fair Program, 1959,’ NARA 306/1011/1; ‘Follow-up study of visitor reaction to the U.S. versus major competing exhibits at the Brussels International Fair,’ (June 1959), NARA 306/1011/2.

⁵⁶ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 40-41.

⁵⁷ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 137, 151; R. Magnúsdóttir, “‘Be Careful in America,’” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (2006): 111.

choice of a single, simple, relatively low volume – pointed up the differences: their contrasting geometry, one a parallelepiped (the Soviet block!), the other a cylinder.⁵⁸

The Soviet designers were concerned to find out as much as possible about the plans of other nations, especially their powerful neighbor. Information about the American intentions was hard to glean, however, and the U.S. was behind on the official schedule. As a U.S. planning document noted, many other countries were late too; all, it seems, were waiting and watching to see what the others would do.⁵⁹ In the crucial planning stages the Soviet organizers had to move ahead on the basis of informed guesses, since they, too, were late and could not delay their own construction indefinitely. At a meeting about the architecture and construction of the fair in November 1956, all participating countries were given the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the pavilions of other countries including the Belgian ones, Canada, Spain, Poland, Norway, Vatican, UK ... but not the USA.⁶⁰ Representing the USSR, Viktor Dubov, one of the architects of the Soviet pavilion, tried to wrinkle more information about the design of their future neighbor out of the Belgian chief architect of the fair. The latter answered that there was 'not yet a project, but from descriptions one can conclude that an oval or circular pavilion was intended, close in volume to that of the USSR, and that it would not be a high rise construction.'⁶¹ This last point was significant in that a tower would be an assertion of supremacy that would be hard to leave unanswered, as well as stealing light from its Soviet neighbor. At a reception on 31 May 1957 dedicated to USA participation in the World Fair, Cullman finally announced that the USA pavilion, by architect Edward Stone, would be the biggest circular building in the world and would cost over five million dollars. It was to be made of plastic, poured concrete, and steel. The suspended roof would be structurally innovative with plastic spokes like a wheel. The Soviet designers did not yet know for certain that it would be a low drum modeled on the Roman coliseum, intended 'as a confident statement on the American imperium' but looking more like a circus big top. By the time this was found

⁵⁸ See the photograph by Michael Rougier of the Soviet and U.S. Pavilions under construction, April 1958. *Life*. <<http://bit.ly/b2OMD2>>

⁵⁹ NARA 306/71 A 2101/159: 'US Participation in Brussels "World Fair",' p. 4.

⁶⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, l. 64 (Otchet o rabote sektsii arkhitektury i stroitel'stva mezhdunarodnoi vystavki, 21 Nov. 1956).

⁶¹ Ibid; GARF f. 9470 op. 1, d. 25, l. 74.

out, some time before October 1957, the Soviet pavilion was already under construction.⁶²

The Soviet pavilion also made claims for modernity and power through its architecture, aiming to 'attract attention by the rigor of its architectural form'—a simple bright building of steel and glass—by its dimensions (22 m high), by its originality of construction,' and also by its lightness and elegance.⁶³ The design was chosen by a competition announced by the Chamber of Commerce and Committee for Construction Affairs under the Council of Ministers. According to the brief issued in July 1956, 'a project is needed whose architectural image reflects the greatness and powerful capacity of the Soviet Union and demonstrates the capacities of the Soviet construction industry.' Twenty-one groups of architects submitted projects, of which one of the simplest was chosen, by a relatively young collective of architects: Dubov, Iu. Abramov, A. Polianskii along with Boretskii and engineers Iu. Ratskevich and K. Vasil'eva.⁶⁴ According to Boretskii,

Our solution takes the simplest form of a parallelepiped. Its significance lies in that the whole pavilion is suspended from seven pairs of piers by which an aluminium ceiling, glazed in the central section, is supported by openwork trusses using cables, and from which are hung glass walls. The result is a light and simple construction of glass and metal whose interior space is separated from the exterior space by a corrugated glass wall, allowing visitors outside to look in and see what there is inside the pavilion.⁶⁵

⁶² GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 200-1 (Ryzhkov).

⁶³ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 9, l. 152, l. 142.

⁶⁴ Catherine Cooke, 'Modernity and Realism: Architectural Relations in the Cold War,' in Blakesley and Reid, eds, *Russian Art and the West*, 188 of 172-94; GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 16, ll. 102-4. According to Boretskii, six projects were shortlisted for further work, with that of the Moscow Architectural Studio of the Ministry of Construction being chosen in the end. GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 39-40 (Stenogramma soveshchaniia ministerstv i vedomstv po voprosam ob organizatsii Vsemirnoi vystavki 1958 (1 Sept. 1956), chair M.V. Nesterov). On the pavilion see also A. Vasil'ev, 'Proekt pavil'ona SSSR na Mezhdunarodnoi vystavke v Briussele,' *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 2 (1957): 43-6; G. Gradov, 'Cherty budushchego v arkhiterture Briussel'skoi vystavki 1958 g.,' *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 2 (1959): 48-62; A. Polianskii, Iu. Ratskevich, 'Pavil'on SSSR na Vsemirnoi vystavke 1958 g. v Briussele,' *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 5 (1958): 32-41; A. Polianskii, Iu. Ratskevich, *Vsemirnaia vystavka v Briussele, 1958. Pavil'on SSSR* (Moscow: Gosstroizdat, 1960); Iu. Ratskevich, 'Konstruktsii pavil'ona SSSR na Vsemirnoi vystavke v 1958g. v Briussele,' *Novaia tekhnika i peredovoi opyt v stroitel'stve*, no. 4 (1958): 1-6; I. Nikolaev, N. Mel'nikov, *Vsemirnaia vystavka v Briussele 1958. Arkhitektura, konstruktsiia, formy pavil'onov* (Moscow, 1963). The construction had to be designed such that it could be dismantled after the Expo and transported back to Moscow to be reinstalled at the Industrial Exhibition. GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 199-200; d. 16, l. 104.

⁶⁵ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 39-40.

Although 'the special conditions' for comparing the socialist and capitalist systems created by the pavilion's proximity to the French and American ones was noted in the competition brief, the architects were only prepared to be reactive up to a point. Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, given the difficulty of finding out any detail about others' plans, the decision was taken that the Soviet Union should not enter into direct competition and try to outdo the capitalist pavilions in virtuoso tricks. Reporting in September 1956 on the architecture of other nations' pavilion designs, Boretskii asserted that the character of those designs that were not yet known might be judged from the design for the Atomium, 'spheres floating in the air,' which set the keynote of the Exhibition. France was building

just such an extravagant pavilion, which stands on one point with a cantilevered structure. The design of the USA building is unknown but there are grounds to think that it will be something exceptional. We decided that *it would not befit us, the Soviet Union, to perform such extravagant tricks*, rather we must give a calm, clear and simple architectural solution that is at the same time quite contemporary and fit for competition.⁶⁶

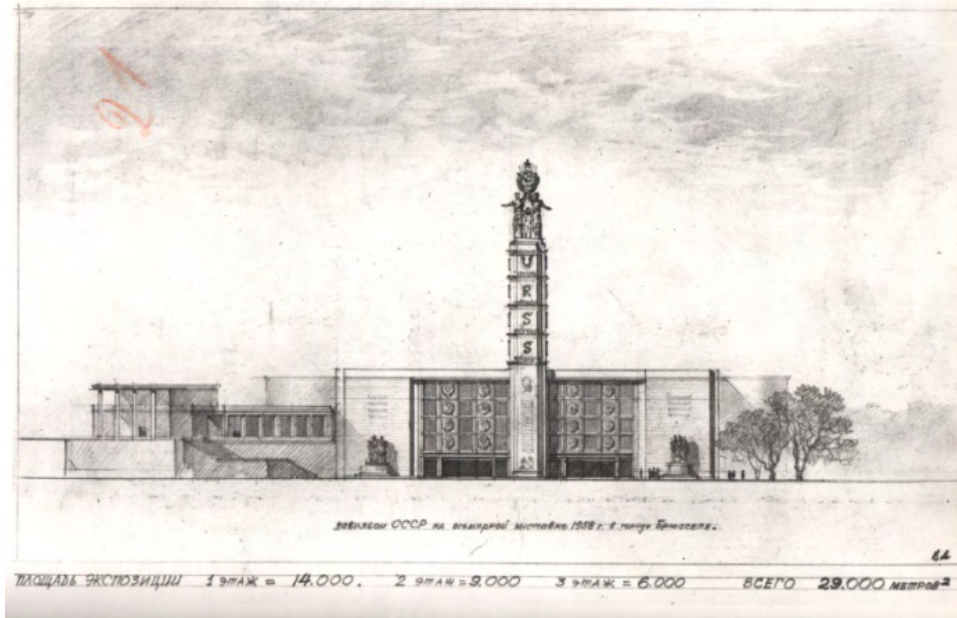
Eschewing extravagant gestures and irrational caprices, the simple rectilinear form of the Soviet pavilion proposed rationality, classical rigor and dignified restraint as a counterpoise to the American coliseum and French flourishes, although all shared the ideal of weightlessness and simplicity.

There are many reasons to speak, in regard to the Soviet pavilion, of a 'convergence' with the International Style, although Catherine Cooke rightly emphasizes that it was not merely a belated or unsuccessful imitation of Western modernism but was rooted in the changes under way in Soviet architectural practice and theory back home in the USSR, as well as in the legacy of Russian Constructivism. The pavilion for Brussels was the first major statement, in a public edifice, of the new line on architecture announced by Khrushchev at the landmark Builders' Conference at the end of 1954.⁶⁷ Monumental and ornate structures and great towers, characteristic of

⁶⁶ Ibid (Boretskii, 1 Sept. 1956) (emphasis added). The French pavilion, by Guillaume Gillet, was also dismissed in the western press as an attention-seeking gesture that 'accomplishes nothing that conventional techniques might not have done more economically.' *Industrial Design* 5, no. 8 (Aug. 1958): 29.

⁶⁷ Cooke, 'Modernity and Realism,' 172-94; N.S. Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel'stva. Rech' na Vsesoiuznom soveshchanii stroitelei, arkhitektorov, i rabotnikov promyshlennosti stroitel'nykh materialov, stroitel'nogo i dorozhnogo*

Stalinist socialist realism, were no longer the language in which to proclaim Soviet power and modernity in the post-war world.



Competition design for elevation of the USSR pavilion.

GARF f.9470, op. 1, d. 22, l.21

Not all the competing design groups in 1956 had yet felt the winds of architectural change, however. The archives contain what appears to be a project drawing of an elevation for the pavilion, which is in a quite different idiom from the one chosen. Imposing and archaic, with a blind facade, monumental staircase, and central tower, it perpetuates the monumentality of the Stalin era. In what seems to be an attempt to reproduce the effect of Boris Iofan's pavilion for the Paris World Fair of 1937, the tower is topped by a sculpture group that recalls Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Collective Farm Worker*, with the significant 'update' that Mr. and Mrs. Soviet Union now have a child between them.⁶⁸ Although this design was stylistically an anachronism and was passed over in favor of Dubov, Boretskii, et al.'s expression of modernity through transparency and technological innovation, it presumably was considered of some

mashinostroeniia, proektnykh i nauchno-issledovatel'skikh organizatsii, 7 dekabria 1954 g. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1955); first published in *Pravda*, 9 December 1954. English translation in Thomas P. Whitney, ed., *Khrushchev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949-1961* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 153-92.

⁶⁸ GARF f.9470, op. 1, d. 22, l. 21. My identification of the drawing is contextual; it is undated and anonymous.

interest or it would not have made it into the archival record. The authors had their ear to the ground in certain respects. The transformation of Mukhina's independent, though coupled, adult figures, allegorically representing the *smychka* (the bond between the worker and peasant), into a nuclear family as a synecdoche for the modern Soviet state is symptomatic of a wider transition in Soviet visual culture: from heroic monumentality to the human-scale, familiar and everyday. This shift, evident already in film and painting of the post-war reconstruction period, cannot be ascribed entirely to foreign influence. It was reinforced, however, in the context of international competition and came to the fore at Brussels. There the Soviet Union sought to modernize and humanize its image by adopting the nuclear family and domestic, everyday life as one of its emblems. This familiarization or humanization—foregrounding the personal, particular and private as the common characteristic state of modernity – was also aspired to by the more forward-looking among the organizers of the pavilion displays.

ii. Peering through the net curtain

Although the Soviet designers were only prepared to work reactively up to a point, seeing it as unbecoming for the USSR to scramble to 'catch up' and outdo capitalist countries on their own terms, they recognized nevertheless that the Soviet exposition must 'resonate polemically' with the American one. For even if visitors to the exhibition did not bring the baggage of Cold War comparisons between the two superpowers with them, they could hardly avoid comparing the two adjacent pavilions. Archival documents reveal the intensity of the Soviet planners' interest in every aspect of how America would present itself at Brussels: not only the architecture and internal displays but also the surrounding events and publicity. The need to counter and compete with American claims was a constitutive factor in the planning of displays for the interior of the pavilion, which was conducted under the sign of 'peaceful competition'.

Here, too, they were hampered in efforts to absorb or repulse the 'Other' by lack of detailed information about the American displays. As with the pavilion design, the U.S. planners kept their plans close to their chest, only trickling out information as and when they chose, to the frustration of the Soviet organizers. In the absence of detailed intelligence, Soviet planners had to second-guess their adversary's intentions. Asked

'What do we know about the American pavilions?,' Zhukov replied: 'Not much. We know that the Americans are preparing an exhibition not of goods but of ideology. The U.S. intention is "to show as vividly as possible [US] ideology, way of life and hopes for the future."' ⁶⁹ 'We don't have much information,' Ryzhkov also admitted, but, he added, 'we ourselves do not say anywhere what we are planning to show.' ⁷⁰

Indeed, the Americans were just as worried about what the Soviets had up their sleeve—particularly after the launch of Sputnik stole their space-race thunder—although the Belgian organizers allegedly disclosed Soviet plans to them, giving them an advantage. ⁷¹ It was in the nature of World Fairs that they compelled participating nations to engage in a balancing act between secrecy and advertisement, both to arouse curiosity and preserve the element of surprise on opening, and to protect trade secrets and technological innovations. They had also always been used for government-sponsored industrial and economic espionage, providing opportunities to learn about product innovations as well as to gain insights into other nations' economic policies. Thus they were occasions for mutual surveillance and suspicion. At the Cold War Expo in Brussels, U.S. fear of the Soviet Union became a constitutive factor shaping the American display. As Robert Rydell argues, the U.S. obsession with national security, while largely covert, became unconsciously part of the exhibition of U.S. culture. ⁷²

⁶⁹ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 204.

⁷⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 205 (report by Ryzhkov to meeting of Consultative Council under Gen. Commissar of Soviet section, 3 Oct. 1957). 'Can't we get more information about what America, UK and France are doing?' another insisted, to which Zhukov promised: 'We will try to use all channels to get hold of this material.' GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 207. For examples of the kind of information they gleaned: GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 76-77 (Materialy Gen. Komissara SShA na Vsemirnoi vystavke 1958 goda, 31 May 1957).

⁷¹ Robert C. Hickok, 'Comments on Brussels World' Fair,' memorandum 8 November 1957, NARA 306/1011/1; B. Schroeder-Gudehus and D. Cloutier, 'Popularizing Science and Ecology during the Cold War: Brussels 1958,' in R. W. Rydell and N. E. Gwinn, eds, *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994): 157-79.

⁷² 'What distinguished American actions at the Brussels fair was that formal, government-sponsored espionage activities were built into the structure of America's participation in the fair and, while unseen, were as much a part of the modernized American cultural landscape as computers, irradiated chickens, lounge chairs, and fashion shows.' R. W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 208-9; Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 145. Beatriz Colomina, comparing the Eames' multi-screen film for ANEM with the design of war rooms, situates it within the culture of surveillance as part of a wider consideration of how the World War II and Cold War shaped post-war design. Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War*.

Small wonder then that Soviet observers could glean little information in advance of the opening. The threat presented by their American neighbor was glimpsed, as if through a net curtain, and their response was based primarily on prejudice, rumors, informed guessing and projections based on past performance. In the absence of detailed intelligence, the 'Amerika' that was absorbed into their plans for Brussels grew into a looming chimera.

iii. The Common Theme: A New Humanism

Common ground among the Cold War adversaries was not only imposed spatially but also conceptually by the Belgian exhibition organizers. The fair's umbrella slogan was '*Pour un monde plus humain*'—'for a more humane world'—and it was a requirement of participation at Brussels that every national display should address this theme in its own way, demonstrating 'its own conception of happiness and of the paths to attaining it,' as the Director General, Baron Moens de Fernig put it.⁷³ A key aspect of the international message was the rhetoric that scientific progress would improve human life. The Special Brussels Fair Working Group, responsible for the U.S. section, expressed this in a February 1957 report as 'the search for a new humanism in a century dominated by the machine.' The fair must sound 'a note of hope that man, on the threshold of the Atomic Age, may find a better means of achieving human understanding and peace.'⁷⁴ Since one of the most urgent areas requiring international cooperation was nuclear containment, the humanist theme was inflected by the 'Atoms for Peace' agenda, which was already marketed abroad by USA as part of its 'peace offensive'. Thus the common message might be summed up: 'Hope, Happiness and Humanism under the shadow of the atom.' As Boretiskii indicated, the keynote was set by the great Atomium, emblem of scientific optimism, visible from almost all points of the exposition ground. Making the atom visible as a fairground attraction, and reassuringly serving as a landmark by which lost visitors might orient themselves, the Atomium's benign and entertaining presence distracted from the destructive potential of nuclear fission. This was an approach in which both Cold War camps were ready to

⁷³ Haddow, *Pavilions*, 94-95.

⁷⁴ 'Background Information on the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition of 1958,' 3 May 1956, NARA 306/71 A2101/159; 'Tentative Outline of U.S. Participation in Brussels World Fair,' 31 May 1956, NARA 306/1011/1.

collude. Indeed, denial, decoy, cover-up and camouflage were widely shared projects at the Expo, including, in the Soviet case, sweeping back under the carpet Stalin's recently exposed crimes, and washing away the bad taste left by the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956.⁷⁵

The American interpretation of the theme

What would the American chimera look like? Here we will focus on those aspects of the American take on the common theme that had most relevance for understanding the Soviet interlocution.⁷⁶ As Rydell observes, fear and covert surveillance were belied by the aura of freedom, ease, and spontaneity, which the U.S. pavilion cultivated.⁷⁷ It was meant to express 'the American spirit, with a feeling of openness and naturalness.'⁷⁸ The rhetoric of freedom, candor, and relaxation was expressed both by Edward Stone's architecture and by a seemingly unstructured, fragmentary display, such that viewers felt free to choose spontaneously their own route around it. The architecture, reminiscent of a circus big top, also suggested that this was a place for entertainment, relaxation, indulgence and play. *Pravda* called it a 'gilded candybox'. Inside, the center of the pavilion was set out like a swimming pool with lounge chairs and ice cream, where one could relax, eat, drink, and watch fashion shows. The displays represented American culture as a paradise of opportunities for individual economic mobility and mass consumption, developing under the benevolent guidance of corporate capitalists.⁷⁹ A report filed by Cullman after the fair cited a foreign visitor to the American exhibit in Brussels:

⁷⁵ Fredie Floré and Mil de Kooning, 'The Representation of Modern Domesticity in the Belgian Section of the Brussels World's Fair of 1958,' *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 4 (2003): 319-40 (320); Schroeder-Gudehus and Cloutier, 'Popularizing Science and Ecology during the Cold War: Brussels 1958,' 157-79.

⁷⁶ For detailed accounts of the American pavilion: Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 193-210; Haddow, *Pavilions*, 93-111; Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 141-50; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 139-70.

⁷⁷ Forty exits 'gave European visitors the illusion that they could walk away from American culture.' Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 206-11; Haddow, *Pavilions*, 110. Visitors reportedly said that they felt 'complete and unrestricted freedom in the U.S. Pavilion.' 'A Report on Certain Considerations Involved in the Operation of an Exhibition Pavilion at a World Fair' (prepared by staff of the U.S. Pavilion, January 1959), NARA 306/1011/1.

⁷⁸ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 143.

⁷⁹ Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 211.

The American Pavilion underscores freedom. Visitors here feel and appreciate the friendly, gay atmosphere. There is no compression or compulsion. Man seems to recognize that his importance as an individual receives support in the American Pavilion. Even if you haven't displayed all of the wonders of the United States, you have created a happy, comfortable mood. You have convinced the world of your love of peace and tranquility. The pavilion and its programs, I believe, are the best story that America has told about herself thus far.⁸⁰

US advisers 'indicated strongly that this should not be a commercial show and should not in any way be boastful ... should not belabor the obvious by playing up American wealth, power, machinery or gadgets.' An understated, soft sell approach was adopted.⁸¹ The viewer, it was assumed, was there to have a good time, to relax and be entertained, and therefore the display should not brag, nor should it be didactic; ideas must be conveyed not through theoretical concepts or abstract precept but through concrete example, primarily through images and actual things:

In contrast to other mass media an exhibit best conveys abstract ideas and intuitive feelings through the skilful arrangement of carefully chosen objects, not through the written word. The best way to sell America is the 'soft pitch'... All in all the visitor must be pleased, flattered and amused. The minute he feels that he is being 'educated' or 'fed a line' the battle for his mind is lost. The Fair visitor, whether he be a streetcleaner or a university professor, goes to the Fair for entertainment. The didactic approach is not the way to reach him in that state of mind.⁸²

Soviet sleuths managed to glean information that the narrative would focus on Fordist modernity and the American way of life, with a dual thrust: living standards/prosperity; and freedom/democracy.⁸³ This was to be expected since these were coupled already in the USIA's 'People's Capitalism' campaign, which sought to mollify the negative image of capitalism among European populations. A USIA survey conducted in Great Britain, France, West Germany, Italy and the Netherlands in April-May 1956 had found that capitalism was widely regarded as an unjust system in which goods were not fairly distributed and the many were exploited by the few, whereas

⁸⁰ NARA 306/71A2101/15a (Background file for Montreal Exhibition: Report on Brussels), p. 29.

⁸¹ 'Thematic Treatment: United States Exhibit, Brussels World's Fair 1958,' NARA 306/1011/1.

⁸² Ibid, p. 9.

⁸³ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 204. These two messages would be conflated at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. In the 'kitchen debate' Richard Nixon reduced 'democracy' to the consumer's choice between brands. Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 243.

socialism, associated with welfare and security, was generally viewed positively.⁸⁴ The 'People's Capitalism' campaign propagated a benevolent image of capitalism emphasizing equality of opportunity, fairness of distribution, comfortable living standards of the average American worker, and the relative growth of the middle class.⁸⁵ In the same vein, 'The U.S. exhibit should convey the feeling that in the USA there is a more equitable distribution of *all* the good things of life than anywhere else in the world. Chief among these good things are: political freedom, protection of the individual and opportunity for his growth, advancement in social welfare, cultural opportunity, and a fair share of material goods.'⁸⁶ It would try to make capitalism appear more humane by laying claim to values that were positively identified with socialism. 'People's Capitalism', called forth by the perceived need to counter communist propaganda against capitalism, might be seen as a form of rhetorical convergence with socialism. In Europe, however, it was received not as convergence but as oxymoron: 'The people aren't capitalists.'⁸⁷

According to Soviet intelligence, Zhukov reported, the American pavilion would 'definitely have material about the good life [represented by] two cars to one family, a separate house with fifteen rooms, their wardrobe, and a mechanical kitchen where everything is electronic.'⁸⁸ Another report confirmed that the American kitchen would be featured, in the form of two or three working fitted kitchens. Other exhibits would include color television and special listening booths where visitors could listen to music of their choice. The 'hook and major propaganda measure' was a film 'America, Land and People.'⁸⁹ Ryzhkov reported that at the reception in Brussels on 31 May 1957, the only thing the Americans divulged about their intentions concerned this film, projected in 360 degrees in a Circarama (Disney), which was to be seen for the first time outside the

⁸⁴ USIA Research and Reference Service report, 'West European Attitudes Related to the People's Capitalism Campaign' (31 Dec. 1956), NARA 306/1011/1.

⁸⁵ Ibid.; compare Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 133, 140 ff.

⁸⁶ 'Thematic Treatment: United States Exhibit, Brussels World's Fair 1958,' NARA 306/1011/1, p. 2; Report on planning meeting of Cambridge Study Group for the Brussels Universal and International Exposition (16 March 1957), NARA 306/71 A2101/161; Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 198.

⁸⁷ 'West European Attitudes,' NARA 306/1011/1. Robert Hickok warned (9 January 1958) that the proposed title for a planned Stock Exchange Exhibit for Brussels, 'Free People's Capitalism' was likely to confuse matters. NARA 306/1011/1.

⁸⁸ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 204.

⁸⁹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 9, l. 154.

USA. The viewer, placed in the center, would feel as if he was a participant in the events shown on screen.⁹⁰

The other aspect the Americans were bound to emphasize, Soviet reports noted—and which the Soviet exhibition planners must pre-empt and undercut—was democracy; they would represent America as a land of freedom and equality. They would try to show, for example, ‘that negroes are happy in the USA’. To countervail this message, the USSR must therefore show the well-being of Soviet minorities, especially the peoples of the Far North, forestalling possible accusations that these peoples were oppressed under Soviet rule.⁹¹

Domesticating the atom; feminizing the viewer

The U.S. decision to interpret the Expo’s Hope–Happiness–Humanism theme primarily in terms of living standards was partly a response to the inversion, during the planning stages, of the balance of power in relation to scientific supremacy. Initially, the conception of the Brussels fair, emphasizing scientific and technological progress, seemed to guarantee America a world-leading position, but ‘the advent of Sputnik puts a new face on a lot of things that deal with the image which America needs to present abroad,’ as a memo of 8 November 1957 noted.⁹² In the event, as an American journalist regretted, ‘the U.S. had not a single exhibit to show it was in the space race.’⁹³

According to adviser Arthur Schlesinger, the U.S. exhibit had to, above all, explicitly to refute the Soviet claim that communism was the only way to master and apply the technical revolution to human life.⁹⁴ Rather than compete on ground that had been snatched from under their feet, the American program for the pavilion, ‘Face of America’, was weighted even more heavily than originally planned in favor of ‘peaceful’ cultural displays and alluring consumer goods, emphasizing the products rather than

⁹⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 76-77.

⁹¹ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 204-5 (Predlozheniia k tematicheskomu planu Vsemirnoi vystavki 1958 g.).

⁹² Robert Hickok, ‘Comments on Brussels World’s Fair,’ memorandum of 8 November 1957, NARA 306/1011/1. Hickok was worried by lack of coordination and timely planning of the American section, and a failure to balance a planned exhibit of Wall Street with one about or sponsored by American labor. He referred to a worrying Moscow dispatch outlining Soviet plans to stress scientific achievements at the fair and a report from Cairo of a Soviet exhibit on Sputnik. Haddow, *Pavilions*, 105-6.

⁹³ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 145, citing *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 June 1958, commentary by William Anderson.

⁹⁴ Cited by Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 196.

the scientific advances that made them possible, many of them spin-offs from defense and the space program.⁹⁵

For the Americans, as well as for the Soviets, Brussels was part of a learning experience. European reception of American displays at international exhibitions, including Paris in 1956 as well as Brussels, was closely studied. This intelligence informed, for example, the planning of the American National Exhibition in Moscow (ANEM) for the following year, where the USIA sought a way to represent America as the land of material abundance while at the same time rebranding materialism as humanism: a concern for the good of man – and, particularly, woman. There, a ‘policy guidance’ document advised, the treatment of technology should emphasize ‘that our technology is for us only a means to an end, not an end in itself, and that our goal is an increasingly better life for the individual – increasing his security and health, his standard of living, his opportunity for personal development. What is often called our “materialism” is really only a means to a greater humanism.’⁹⁶ This conflation of materialism and humanism, adopted already at Brussels under the influence of the general theme of the Expo, became a central element of American propaganda. Advance publicity for the Moscow fair issued in February 1959 proclaimed: ‘Soviet women soon will get a chance to see that American scientific progress is not limited to a man’s world. Modern U.S. inventions also are making life easier for the housewife.’⁹⁷ More surprisingly, as we shall see, a similar approach was also taken by the Soviets.

‘Humanizing’ the narratives of progress in the late 1950s also meant feminizing them, invoking women as its beneficiaries in ways that reaffirmed traditional gender roles. ‘For the good of man’, the unmarked universal category, was interpreted and embodied in terms of ‘helping women’; ‘human happiness’ as ‘making women happy.’ The effort to refute the Soviet claim that Communism was the only way to master and apply the technical revolution to human life, as Schlesinger advised, was addressed in particular to women as housewives and mothers, or used women to stand for domestic,

⁹⁵ This was achieved by making ‘science the cornerstone of many of the exhibits in the American pavilion, from the plastic chairs on the terrace to the Acrilan uniforms worn by the guides.’ Haddow, *Pavilions*, 105.

⁹⁶ ‘Policy Guidance for the U.S. Exhibit in Moscow in 1959,’ NARA 306/1050/7.

⁹⁷ ‘Kitchens for Today and Tomorrow Slated for Moscow Exhibition,’ press release issued by Office of ANEM, Washington, GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 595, l. 156.

everyday life and the ways it benefited from scientific progress: you've had the industrial revolution, now for the kitchen revolution! At the same time, the feminized address and the identification with domestic order laundered the atom of its terrifying possibilities. In line with the founding paradox of the Cold Peace—underwritten by Mutually Assured Destruction—domestic comfort served as camouflage for the maintenance of nuclear potential. 'Labor saving' technology, developed by science and powered by the atom, would alleviate women's domestic work. As the magazine *Amerika* put it, the atom was 'the key to civilization.'⁹⁸ In the famous 'kitchen debate' at ANEM in 1959, Khrushchev and Nixon would also compete in their claims for their respective systems' superior capacity to make women happy.⁹⁹

What better medium than a model home to reconcile contradictions and exemplify the humanism of materialism, People's Capitalism, and consumer democracy in such a way as to appeal to the stereotypical woman? The USIA had already made extensive use of show homes in propaganda campaigns since the late 1940s. The 'typical' American ranch-style house 'Splitnik,' in which Khrushchev and Nixon confronted one another in Moscow in 1959, is only the best known of a whole series of U.S. demonstration homes and interiors. As Greg Castillo has shown, it was the culmination of a decade-long campaign to use domestic consumption to promote the American way of life in Eastern Europe, beginning in divided Berlin.¹⁰⁰ The image of the modern American family home, saturated with labor-saving technology, which was propagated through model homes shown at exhibitions as well as through film, print media and advertising, played an important part in identity construction throughout Cold War Europe and helped shape the way the future was imagined.

⁹⁸ Compare Irene Cieraad, 'The Radiant American Kitchen: Domesticating Dutch Nuclear Energy' in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds, *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009), 113-37. This line was also promoted in the magazine *Amerika*, for example in a feature reprinted from *Look*: David O. Vubberi, 'Atomy na sluzhbe mira,' *Amerika*, no. 3 (c. 1957): 33-35; Ivor Evans, 'The Atom at Home,' *The Daily Mail Ideal Home Book 1947-48* (London, 1947): 37-9. The latter article noted the dangers of atomic power but implied that it was only a matter of time before scientists would fully harness and domesticate it.

⁹⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 16-19; Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen,' 211-52; Susan Reid, "'Our Kitchen is Just as Good': Soviet Responses to the American Kitchen,' in Oldenziel and Zachmann, *Cold War Kitchen*, 83-112.

¹⁰⁰ Greg Castillo, 'Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, no. 2 (2005): 261-88.

In the event, the USA passed up the opportunity to show a full-scale model house at Brussels. It limited itself to displaying 'Islands of Living' designed by modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Whereas the 'Splitnik' tract house, addressed to the Soviet mass audience in Moscow the following year, made claims to represent typical living standards available to all Americans, the 'Islands of Living' shown at Brussels aimed, rather, to redress European (East as well as West), perceptions of America as vulgar, consumerist parvenu by emphasizing, cool modernist design and high culture, and thus to lay claims to world cultural leadership in the field of high design.¹⁰¹

'Socialist humanism': the Soviet response to the general theme

Walter Hixson drew a stark contrast between the U.S. and Soviet pavilions. "The U.S. pavilion offered a spacious, uncluttered, and slower-paced exhibition that exuded a "quiet confidence." The Americans seemed to be saying to Europeans, "We don't have to prove our industrial selves to anyone. You see our automobiles on all your streets. Relax a little and learn something of how we live." The Soviets, by contrast, Hixson claims, '*ignoring the fair's theme of "a new humanism,"* filled their exhibition with machine tools, model hydroelectric dams, and statistics on industrial growth, as if to say, "We are large, we are powerful, we have science and industry. We can make anything... and we owe it all to communism."¹⁰²

The contrast between the conception of the two pavilions was not so stark, however, as Hixson—relying on an American journalist's description of the Soviet pavilion—makes out. Contemporary accounts—polemical and filtered through Cold War lenses—cannot be used uncritically as the basis for our judgments of the exhibits and their effects on diverse publics. These need to be triangulated with detailed analysis both of the set-up, based on visual as well as textual evidence, and of the reception,

¹⁰¹ Haddow, *Pavilions*, 153-68; Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 139-70; Castillo, 'The American "Fat Kitchen" in Europe,' in Oldenziel and Zachmann, *Cold War Kitchen*, 33-58; Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 203-ff.; Hugh L. Morris, 'All-State Splitnik: Overseas Home Exhibits Scored as Non-typical,' *Washington Post and Times Herald* (21 March 1959).

¹⁰² Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 144 (emphasis added). The sources Hixson cites here are the American press: *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (8 June 1958) and UPI commentary by William Anderson, while the account of the U.S. pavilion is based also on dispatches from the U.S. organizers Howard Cullman and George Allen.

professional and lay, tasks that lie beyond the scope of the present paper.¹⁰³ Americans and Soviets both took pains to track the effects of their displays on the public. Here we can only glance at this reception; our focus is rather on the Soviet planning and conception of the task. Conceived in dialogue, there were many instances of intertextuality and reflection that muddled the Cold War antithesis. Moreover, to assert that the Soviet organizers ignored the umbrella theme is inaccurate.

Intentions are not, of course, the same thing as results. While we should give due weight to evidence showing that the USSR pavilion was a popular success, there is no doubt some basis for the hostile representations of the Soviet pavilion as a failure, from a professional point of view. The end product would appear to have been a less than happy compromise between conflicting positions. Its achievement was limited for reasons we shall examine more closely below, and was clearly not sufficient to overcome the stereotypes through which Western journalists viewed it, nor to break down the ready-to-hand binaries with which they structured their narratives of the Cold War encounter. But these were the teething troubles of efforts to present the Soviet Union to the post-war world in a new way. They resulted more from unresolved problems and internal differences than from a total failure by all concerned to recognize the demands of the new international situation.

It is true that the Soviet display was vast; to see the whole exhibition one had to walk five to six kilometers inside the pavilion alone.¹⁰⁴ And, of course, it did not fail to capitalize on the temporary superiority in the space race by showing model Sputniks, 'the wonder of our age.'¹⁰⁵ Hixson cites an American journalist who reported that 'Europeans I talked to found the Russian pavilion stiff, old fashioned and dominated by machine tools.'¹⁰⁶ A more sophisticated cultural commentator, British critic Lawrence Alloway, comparing the Soviet trade fair at Earls Court, London, in 1961 with Brussels three years earlier, described the image the USSR presented at these exhibitions as 'a spectacle with a message' and a 'packed anthology, crowded, profusion shading into

¹⁰³ While the American pavilion has received close analysis, equivalent work on the USSR pavilion is only just beginning, as is indicated by the absence of a chapter on this pavilion from the survey of pavilion design, Rika Devos and Mil de Kooning, *L'architecture moderne a l'expo 58* (Brussels: Dexia: Fonds Mercator, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 212; d. 9, l. 142.

¹⁰⁵ Izabella Blum, 'Ekspo-58,' *Ogonek*, no. 13 (23 March 1958), 13.

¹⁰⁶ William Anderson, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (8 June 1958); cited by Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 145.

confusion. Garrulous, cumulative weight, ungraspable profusion to convey plenitude.¹⁰⁷

Frederick Barghoorn noted similarly, 'apparently they were unable to make much of a dent on European and American viewers with a display so lavish that it may even, in some cases, have served only to reinforce negative stereotypes of Russian poverty and backwardness.'¹⁰⁸



Atomic icebreaker Lenin in a grotto of dramatically illuminated simulated icebergs. Soviet Pavilion, Brussels '58.

RGAE f 635, op. 1, d. 369, l. 24

The incoherence and overkill ascribed to the USSR pavilion can also be seen as a Cold War othering trope; analysis of the impact of the competing pavilions on the Belgian and international public was as much terrain for a Cold War battle of representations as were the exhibits themselves. Sensory overload, spectacle, and disorientating bombardment with things were not the unique preserve of the Soviet display. Although the specific aesthetic may have been different, this mode of enchantment was also the established approach of American advertising culture. The Soviet public would criticize the American exhibition in Moscow the following year in

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence Alloway, 'USSR at Earl's Court: The Image,' *Design* 154 (October 1961): 44-6.

¹⁰⁸ Barghoorn, *Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 88.

terms similar to Alloway's, claiming that it was an incoherent, badly organized miscellany and that the Americans had got their audience wrong.¹⁰⁹

The Soviet press coverage of the Expo naturally gave an entirely positive impression of Soviet success, aiming to convince citizens back home that their country was universally recognized as the world leader in scientific and technological progress. Rapturous accounts described foreigners gaping in awe at the achievements of Soviet science, moving from incomprehension, through total absorption, to delight.¹¹⁰ A more sympathetic Western witness, British expert on Soviet design Catherine Cooke, also remembered the Soviet pavilion in positive terms that contradict Hixson's journalist and Alloway: it was 'straightforwardly factual, showing concrete technical and scientific achievements... All this was actually impressively simple and underplayed. It did indeed tell its story without complexity or rhetoric: I recall it well.'¹¹¹

Photographs of the pavilion interior also depict a more innovative display than the foreign accounts gave credit for—although photographs should, of course, also be treated as representations not as transparent evidence, and may reveal as much about the photographer as about the object. Both official Soviet photographs in an album documenting the exhibits kept in the archives of the USSR Chamber of Commerce and those taken by Michael Rougier for *Life* magazine depict the displays of consumer goods on open stands, making full use of the transparency of the pavilion to create an interesting grid effect.¹¹² Others show a dramatic presentation of the atomic icebreaker

¹⁰⁹ For Soviet responses to ANEM see Reid, 'Who Will Beat Whom,' 855-904. A common criticism was that it was inappropriate for Soviet viewers because it appealed not to the rational mind but to the senses, and sought, like a department store, to disorientate with spectacle, glitter, phantasmagoria. NARA 306/1043/11 (Comments books of visitors to American National Exhibition, Moscow 1959); TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 13.

¹¹⁰ Andrei Novikov, 'S utra i do vechera,' *Ogonek*, no. 24 (8 June 1958): 24; V. Zakharchenko, *Na poroge velikogo veka* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1959); 'Chelovek i progress,' *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* (28 January 1958); I. Bol'shakov, *Vsemirnyi smotr: uspekh SSSR na vsemirnoi vystavke v Briussele* (Moscow: Izvestiia, 1959); Iu. Kotler, 'Na vsemirnoi vystavke,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 7 (July 1958): 28-9; Boris Agapov, *Poezdka v Briussel'* (Moscow: Pravda, 1959); Izabella Blium, 'Ekspo-58,' *Ogonek*, no. 13 (23 March 1958): 13; Marietta Shaginian, *Zarubezhnye pis'ma* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964), 71-140. Internal reports celebrated and analyzed the success of the Soviet pavilion, judged on the basis of visitor numbers, observation and comments, and monitoring of the Belgian press. GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 590, ll. 264-5.

¹¹¹ Cooke, 'Modernity and Realism,' 189.

¹¹² Photographs of exhibits on the balcony of the Soviet pavilion, Brussels World Fair, 1958 in official photograph album, 'Pavil'on SSSR na vsemirnoi vystavke v g Briussele 1958'; RGAE (Russian State Archive of the Economy) f. 635 (USSR Chamber of Commerce), op.1, d. 369, l. 24. Compare photograph by Michael Rougier, April 1958, for *Life* magazine at <<http://bit.ly/dk4ExH>>; and other photos from *Life* at <<http://bit.ly/dDf9bk>>.

*Lenin in a grotto of simulated icebergs dramatically illuminated with ultraviolet light.*¹¹³

Above all, the condescending opinions of professional journalists and experts do not reflect the lay public response. Allegations that the Soviet pavilion was unsuccessful are belied by U.S. surveys during and after the fair, which found the USA lagging worryingly far behind it in mass popularity.¹¹⁴ The Soviet pavilion was one of the most visited of the whole exhibition, with a daily average of 120 thousand visitors. According to figures for the period 17 April to 14 June, of the total 10,549,227 visitors to the Expo as a whole, around three quarters, over seven million visited the USSR pavilion.¹¹⁵ And in the end, it was the mass audience the Soviet planners most wanted to impress.

Quantitative evidence of visitor numbers tells us little about their motives and visit agendas or about the effect the exhibition had on different categories of viewers. The U.S. journalist cited by Hixson qualified his criticism by admitting that 'the Soviets

¹¹³ RGAE f. 635, op.1, d. 369, l. 24.

¹¹⁴ 'Follow-up study of visitor reactions,' NARA 306/1011/2; 'Visitor reaction to the U.S. vs major competing exhibits at the Brussels International Fair,' NARA 306/1011/1. The Soviet organizations followed established Soviet practice at exhibitions by collecting public response to the pavilion in the form of visitors' comments books, as well as surveying the foreign press. Sources for reception, in addition to the press (western as well as Soviet) include 14 volumes of visitors' comments in different languages kept by the USSR Chamber of Commerce. These, however, are very diverse and, being predominantly in the vein of the 'polite guest,' qualitative analysis is less fruitful than in the case of other comments books. RGAE f. 635 (USSR Chamber of Commerce) op. 2, dd. 377-390 (Otzyvy posetitelei Sovetskogo paviliona na Vsemirnoi vystavke v Briussele). The archives also include digests and translations from the foreign press as well as excerpts from comments books translated into Russian. GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 18. Siegelbaum ('Representation of Technology') puts Soviet concern with monitoring western audience response down to insecurity, but the evidence suggests it is motivated at least as much by a will to raise their game by studying their opponents' style. The Soviets studied reception in order to improve the effectiveness of their efforts. It was also standard practice to collect responses at all exhibitions.

The USIA also monitored the impact of their own pavilion and of others, and had an Office of Research: Program and Media Studies (1956-62) dedicated to such monitoring. It had already conducted a survey of visitor reactions to the U.S. and other pavilions early in the course of the Fair, 17-27 May 1958 so that any negative results could be acted upon and changes implemented if necessary. A follow-up study was considered useful because the first study showed that visitor reactions were not entirely favorable; because of indications that the U.S. exhibition was surpassed in visitor ratings by four or five other entries including the Czech and Soviet pavilions; and because of 'evidence that the Soviet Pavilion had greater favorable impact on visitor attitudes than did that of the U.S. despite apparently more frequent doubts about the credibility of the Soviet presentation.' It made use of the more scientific means of public opinion polling available to it via Belgian market research firms, which were not yet available to the Soviets.

¹¹⁵ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 590 (Perepiska s ministerstvami i drugimi uchrezhdeniiami SSSR ob organizatsii sovetskogo pavil'ona na Vsemirnoi vystavke v Briussele, 1958), ll. 95, 248-49. In the first week, 17-23 April, of 673,301 visitors to the Expo, 541,000 visited the Soviet pavilion. In the week of 8 June, of a total 1,286,000 visitors, 900,000 visited the Soviet pavilion.

generated visitor enthusiasm with their three model satellites.’¹¹⁶ But the high interest in the USSR pavilion need not be put down to Sputnik alone. A Soviet internal report objected to this interpretation:

Belgium’s bourgeois press, striving to distort the genuine reason for great interest in the Soviet pavilion, to begin with tried to explain the high visitor numbers by the fact that the Soviet pavilion contains the first Sputnik. Sputnik does indeed arouse great interest. But ... almost all sections of the Soviet pavilion are visited by large numbers. Numerous comments in visitors’ books bear witness to the fact that ordinary people in capitalist countries of the West are inspired and impressed by the great progress achieved by our country in all aspects of life.¹¹⁷

For the Soviets, foreign fascination with Sputnik was not enough. It might pull in the visitors, but what mattered was that they should take away the main message about what Soviet progress under socialism did for man.

If viewers did take away with them the effect of bombardment with machinery, as Hixson alleges, this was not the impression that modernizers among the Soviet planners’ intended. On the contrary, they sought expressly to avoid this effect. As far as the *intentions* of the Soviet organizers and the approach they took to wooing this mass audience are concerned, these had much more in common with the American ones than Hixson allows. However, established display culture and ineptitude, combined with differences between the bureaucracies involved in the organization, may have been to blame (in addition to Cold War lenses) for Western professional commentators’ perception of a rather heavy-handed display.

The Soviet planners did not ignore the umbrella slogan of the fair; on the contrary, their deliberations concerning how to present the Soviet Union to the European audience were conducted in close reference to it, seeking to embody, in systemic, socialist terms, the Brussels theme of happiness, humanism and benevolent science. In Soviet discussions the official umbrella theme was rendered ‘Everything for Mankind’, with the subthemes ‘Man and Progress’ or ‘progress in service of man.’ The aim was to place ‘man’ and his happy life in the center, to show Soviet democracy,

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (8 June 1958); Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 145.

¹¹⁷ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 590, l. 249. (report from Ia. Lomko to G. Zhukov covering period 17 April-31 May 1958).

socialist humanism, and progress in the service of humanity and world peace.¹¹⁸ Since all capitalist propaganda would be directed toward demonstrating the superiority of the capitalist system in regard to the theme of 'human happiness and how it is understood in different countries,' the Soviet display must also show how, under socialism, man was 'at the center of all its state institutions, all industry, of all art.'¹¹⁹ *Moscow News*, the Soviet English language paper, gave advance notice to the Anglophone world of plans for the pavilion in autumn 1957: Soviet displays under the slogan 'Everything for Mankind' would stress that all its efforts towards scientific and technological advance were harnessed to the universal good of humanity and to the cause of peaceful coexistence; the Soviet Union—not the USA—was the leader in the promotion of world peace, and (as Schlesinger anticipated) only the Soviet socialist system was fully able to apply the benefits of scientific and technological advance to the good of human beings.¹²⁰ The USSR would show how these 'benefit the well-being and facilitate the intellectual development of people' under the leadership of party and government in the peace-loving Soviet state. Peaceful uses of the atom would be demonstrated, including medical applications and the atomic powered icebreaker *Lenin*.¹²¹ Visitors 'should see that the young Soviet state has won all these victories in a historically very short period—40 years of Soviet power—having defended them in the fire of the Civil War and Second World War.'¹²² They must come away with an understanding that the socialist path to progress was not only more 'democratic,' but faster—a message it was particularly important to project to the developing world.

Just as it was for the American display, a central take on the theme of human happiness in the USSR Pavilion was the rise in mass living standards. The exhibits had to 'demonstrate the material and cultural achievements of the contemporary epoch,

¹¹⁸ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27; d. 9; GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 14, l. 27 (discussions and reports on Thematic-Exposition Plan.; According to a report shortly before the opening, the general theme of the Soviet pavilion was 'What has Soviet power given to the people in the 40 years of its existence?', rendered in four subthemes: USSR, a socialist multinational, peace-loving state; achievements of industry and agriculture; development of socialist culture; and growth of the material prosperity of the Soviet people. GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 9, l. 156.

¹¹⁹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 56-61; d. 21, ll. 159-62 (Lomko); GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 27.

¹²⁰ *Moscow News* (2 October 1957); cited in NARA 306/1011/1 (US Embassy despatch no 164, 3 Oct. 1957: 'Soviet Participation in 1958 Brussels World's Fair.')

¹²¹ Novikov, 'S utra,' 24; GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 173-75.

¹²² GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3, l. 7.

showing how, on the basis of universal peace, a well-provided life is created for every person.' Emphasizing the specificity of socialism, welfare, services, social benefits, state provision for mothers and children, and social housing all played an important role in presenting the image of how socialist progress benefited the greatest number of people.¹²³ However, consumer goods and leisure were also prominent. The section dedicated to 'Objects of Popular Consumption' on the mezzanine floor, was to demonstrate the Soviet state's concern to raise the workers' living standards and the diversity and high quality of Soviet consumer goods. Fabrics, clothing, shoes, and food products were accompanied by texts, diagrams and photographs illustrating the growth of production and sale to the population of items of popular consumption and the growth of the people's purchasing power under the Soviets.¹²⁴



Soviet model apartment and kitchen displayed in Soviet pavilion at Brussels '58.
RGAE f 635 op 1 d 369: l. 15

¹²³ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 152-59.

¹²⁴ GARF f. 9518, op 1, d. 588, ll. 2-10 (Memo to authors preparing materials for USSR pavilion c. July 1957, included with letter from General Commission of Soviet section to the Chair of SCCLFC); GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 133-36. The planned texts made claims such as: 'the production of objects of mass consumption in 1957 is 13 times greater than in 1913,' citing chapter and verse for authority: *Kommunist*, no. 16 (1957): 96. Photos dedicated to the work of Soviet fashion houses were accompanied by the text: 'The state shows its concern for beautiful clothing for the population.'

In telling the story of socialist modernity, humanism and progress, and emphasizing science and technology in the service of human happiness, a central role was played by the image of mass housing construction. A monumental painting by Alexander Deineka, *For Peace* (1958) set the keynote, identifying peace with urban construction. Photographs and statistics told of the reconstruction of war-damaged cities, and the construction of new mass housing regions, schools and hospitals. Above all, the intensive industrialized housing campaign launched in 1957 served as a platform for demonstrating the party-state's concern for ordinary people's welfare and the advantages of central planning.¹²⁵

To make 'housing' less abstract, bring statistics about the scale of the housing campaign to life, and render the achievement palpable, exhibits included two life-size models of furnished apartment interiors representing the new type of standard, prefabricated, small-scale flats designed for single-family occupancy, which were the basis of the Khrushchev-era housing campaign. They were fully furnished in a conservatively modern style, and included kitchens where one could see domestic equipment including refrigerators, vacuum cleaner and other electric appliances.¹²⁶ Thus the viewer moved from photos and figures representing the scale of mass housing construction to the interior of an individual dwelling, where they might imagine the domestic comfort, joys of 'private life' enjoyed by the Soviet family in housing provided by the state and public purse.

Some of the planners had doubts, however, concerning the resonance this prefabricated industrialized mass housing would have with the foreign audience. Here, too, deliberations were shaped by the need to take on board anti-Soviet propaganda and

¹²⁵ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 139-49 (Tematiko-ekspozitsionnyi plan pavil'ona SSSR, as approved by USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade, 31 May 1957).

¹²⁶ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 16, l. 299; RGAE f. 635, op. 1, d. 369, l. 15; . Willy van der Meeren, 'Wonen op de algemene Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel 1958,' *Habiter* 7 (Dec 1958): 29-34; 'Interieurs en gebruiksvoorwerpen op de Expo,' *Goed wonen*, no. 6 (June 1958): 101-02; 135-39 (137 for photo of the Russian interior); 'Zo zouden vele landen willen wonen,' *Goed wonen*, no. 12 (Dec. 1958): 270-77 (p. 227 for Russian interior). With thanks to Jeis Bauwens and Céline Goessaert.

Soviet agencies had also begun to take an interest in the use of model homes as a display format for domestic use to educate public taste and expectations, and in November 1957 had even invited the London *Daily Mail* to bring its "Ideal Home" Exhibition to Moscow for 1958. Public Record Office, Kew, London, BW2/532. Confidential memo regarding possible *Daily Mail* 'Ideal Home' Exhibition in Moscow (18 Nov. 1957).

the comparative context. 'As regards showing apartments,' Zhukov's colleague A. T. Kuznetsov warned,

One must say that in regard to the construction industry we are not ahead. It is better to show the reconstruction of cities destroyed in the war. Here – the city in ruins – there as it is today. Or take the South West region of Moscow: to show who lives there. In the West they wrote that this little town is being constructed for ministers and functionaries. You're not going to amaze them with the fact that so many apartments have been built.¹²⁷

Zhukov also had doubts concerning the effectiveness of showing Soviet model homes in the comparative context. 'If we just show apartments and their furnishings it will not be convincing and will arouse ridicule. We have to give everything in comparison.

Moreover it is necessary to think about the things that will resonate polemically with the American ones.'¹²⁸ Compared to the separate house of fifteen rooms, with two cars and an electric kitchen, which Zhukov predicted the U.S. pavilion would 'definitely' use to demonstrate prosperity, these standard, minimal-specification apartments might not persuade the foreign viewer that the USSR was the land of abundance and high living standards for all.

As we saw, the USA chose not to play its living-standards trump card and show off the American way of life in the form of a model home, although many other nations participating at Brussels demonstrated their national ideals in this format.¹²⁹

Nevertheless, in adopting domestic space and specifically a home for an individual nuclear family as a site to project Soviet ideals and achievements the Soviet exhibit was poaching a symbol the USIA had made its signature format for promoting the 'American way of life' in Europe, and which had become closely identified with America. Moreover, the vital distinction between owner-occupied homes and social housing, which stood for the whole systemic difference of approach to prosperity and happiness, was fudged in the mode of presentation. The interiors the Soviets showed were horizontal sections of an apartment block, opened up to allow visitors to see inside and (it would appear from some photos, although these may have been for publicity only) to walk through. But tired viewers, more accustomed to the model of the cottage or bungalow—such as was

¹²⁷ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 207.

¹²⁸ Ibid, l. 204.

¹²⁹ Fredie Floré and Mil de Kooning, 'The Representation of Modern Domesticity in the Belgian Section of the Brussels World's Fair of 1958,' in *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 4 (2003): 319-40.

popular in Belgian and British post-war housing schemes and which in ideal home exhibitions and magazine features embodied the dream of peaceful and comfortable post-war home life—might be forgiven for mistaking the Soviet model apartments for a small, single-story house.

Zhukov and Kuznetsov feared that the Soviet Union might not come off well from the comparisons this might invite. The organizers were concerned about whether the quality and design of Soviet products would let them down.¹³⁰ Already at a meeting of 1 September 1956, Nesterov had said that all exhibits should desirably be 1960 models, adding, 'I doubt they are, but it is necessary to try so that the technology is the very newest.'¹³¹ Indeed, ministries were struggling to deliver enough products of good enough quality for the exhibition. Ryzhkov, rallying the troops not long before the opening, noted the hiatus between representation and reality:

We have not yet achieved a corresponding level of prosperity, our manufacture still does not produce enough. You all know that, and they know it there. The world press will criticize what we show. There will be a struggle of opinions and we need to prepare for that, to defend ourselves within permissible limits and represent our ideas, of whose superiority we are convinced, and which we have to demonstrate to the whole world.¹³²

Thus it was not enough to show results, because Soviet abundance could not yet compete with American plenitude, variety or quality. It was vital, rather, to emphasize the distance travelled, the progress made since before the revolution, and the pace of change: to demonstrate to the world – and especially to developing countries—that if the Soviet Union still had some catching up to do, its path to modernity and prosperity was nevertheless faster. Thus transformation rather than results were the key.¹³³

¹³⁰ A British design critic, examining the products displayed at the Soviet Trade Fair in London 1961 found that Russian manufacturers would have to improve the 'quality of finish and design if their goods are to be fully competitive with Western standards.' Frank Ashford, 'USSR at Earls Court: Products,' *Design*, 154 (October 1961): 47-9.

¹³¹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 34-35 (Stenographic report of meeting of Ministries and Departments regarding organization of the World Fair at Brussels (1 Sept. 1956).

¹³² GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 208-09.

¹³³ One approach to illustrating change (a stock strategy of Socialist Realism) was to juxtapose 'the old and the new.' as for example in the scenario Zhukov outlined, tracing the evolution of a specific worker's family beginning in 1900-1913 and the improvements in their living and working conditions; or to show the heroism of settlers in the Virgin Lands, comparing their living and working conditions when they first settled there to what they had made now, in the space of a few years. Similarly the development of the margins of the USSR and the national republics would be represented. GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 2-10 (Memo to authors preparing materials for USSR pavilion, c. July 1957).

A fundamental dilemma the organizers faced was how to represent transformation through time—how socialist modernization transformed people’s lives in the course of 40 years and provided the liberty, happiness and prosperity for all—and make clear the causes of those changes: the Revolution, party guidance, and socialist central planning. The point, as Zhukov emphasized, was to advertise the socialist system rather than the goods.¹³⁴ But how were they to tell this story of historical development in the spatial, rather than time-based, medium of an exhibition, ‘such that there should not be statics without dynamics,’ as Ryzhkov put it?¹³⁵ And how to tell it, not for the Soviet public already familiar with and able to decode it, but for potentially hostile foreign viewers? How might they demonstrate the dynamics of progress through time and its systemic causes in the visual form of an exhibition in such a way that the foreign audience would stop, look and understand? What mongrel idioms might be required in order to accommodate the expectations and exhibitionary culture of this unfamiliar public and render the Soviet self comprehensible and desirable to the capitalist other? Central questions which the planners had to resolve concerned the relationship between things and ideas, and between the means and machines of production and the rewards in ordinary people’s everyday lives: that is, between production and consumption.

Here the exhibition fell victim to a clash of cultures between the different bodies responsible for the Soviet pavilion—notably between the Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Trade on one hand, and the SCCLFC on the other—concerning the focus of the exhibition and its mode of address. The former, heirs to the tradition of trade fairs, were more familiar with promoting Soviet trade, trying to sell things, especially machines and raw material, and dealing with specialist trade representatives.¹³⁶ The latter, meanwhile, was more concerned with the ‘soft,’ human

¹³⁴ ‘To satisfy the fundamental interests of the people of the Soviet Union the exploitation of man by man is fully liquidated, a powerful world class industry is created, agriculture is collectivized, and the first socialist society in the world is constructed, to which all the wealth of the land belongs.’ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 3, l. 7.

¹³⁵ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 205. Objects, images, statistics and short texts might, it was suggested, be supplemented by specially made films to set them in a larger context and represent change and causality, e.g. to show that increased prosperity was an effect of the scientifically planned economy. But the displays themselves had to carry the main message. GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 2-10.

¹³⁶ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 27; NARA 84/3133/1 (US Foreign Service Airgram from American Embassy Moscow to Department of State, Washington (18 July 1959); Foreign Service despatch, ‘Khrushchev Interview with U.S. Governors’ (15 July 1959); Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 165.

side of things—with selling culture and ideology—and had some experience of the foreign public, its culture and mode of viewing. The Soviet display was also affected by changes at the top after the challenge to Khrushchev's leadership by the 'anti-party group' in June 1957, in which Shepilov was implicated. Although the rift ran partly along institutional lines, it showed some signs of the split between 'friends and foes of change,' as in other professional fields: between a Stalinist isolationist rearguard with its entrenched practices and attitudes, and a pragmatic, modernizing, 'westernizer' or internationalist position. The latter may be associated with the Khrushchev camp and seems to have become dominant after his confirmation in power in June 1957. Shepilov was ousted in June 1957 for alleged involvement with the anti-party group.

Indecisiveness in embracing a new approach may also be put down to the steep learning curve on which the Soviet organizers found themselves as their understanding of the nature of the competition and of the audience grew. In the new climate of international engagement in the second half of the 1950s, bureaucrats such as Zhukov as well as cultural figures, trade and exhibition professionals, came increasingly in contact with foreign ways, life styles, and image cultures through travel and meetings with foreign delegations, in addition to such material as the USIA's illustrated propaganda magazine *Amerika* distributed in the Soviet Union. Back home, the art of exhibition design was becoming the focus of new attention in the context of the flood of foreign exhibitions as well as the reopening of the former All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, rebranded as the Exhibition of Economic Achievements (VDNKh), in summer 1959. One Soviet critic, for example, citing the successful example of the recent Czechoslovak Glass Exhibition, called for exhibition designers to work like film directors, with a scenario rather than a thematic plan — to think visually rather than in terms of verbal themes that had to be illustrated. They should also base their design on systematic research on the psychology of the viewer and not simply rely on visitor's books, currently the only source of information on reception.¹³⁷ The Soviet organizers also learned from others' practices, including those of the Czechoslovak section as well as from the Americans. Moreover, as will be discussed below, they enlisted the services

¹³⁷ Boris Brodskii, 'Vystavke nuzhen stsensarist,' *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 12 (1959), 40-41.

of at least one Belgian public relations firm.¹³⁸

Lack of responsiveness from individual ministries was one problem that inhibited what, on a convergence model, might be called a more 'modern' exposition (i.e. corresponding to a Western norm), combined with their failure to grasp that the World Fair required something different from an exhibition of tractors. Ryzhkov reported (undated but contextually 1956 or early 1957) that only four ministries had offered exhibits to date and even these were unsatisfactory, for their proposals indicated that they had not fully understood the main tasks of the Expo and their responsibility for the Soviet image abroad. Ministries were sending materials quite remote from the aims and tasks of the exhibition. For example, a plan sent by the Ministry of Aviation failed to reflect the current state of aviation technology, while Ryzhkov's former ministry, the Ministry of Machine Tool Production and Automation, ignoring the all-important distinction that the Expo was not a trade fair, but an exhibition of ideologies, had sent a shortlist of exhibits that consisted mainly of watches.¹³⁹ To show numerous different models of watches might be fine at a trade fair, but Brussels was a different matter. 'In June [presumably 1956] a lot was still unclear to us too—but it is now clearer after our visit to Brussels [...] The fair does not have a commercial character but different, deeper goals and tasks,' Ryzhkov concluded.¹⁴⁰

But the difference of approaches was not a simple dichotomy: ideology or products. There was a more complex issue. What was the best way to present progress under the socialist system, such that the message about its system-specific origins was accessible to Western comprehension? To demonstrate it through the achievements of industrialization and technological modernization under central planning? Or by an emphasis on the rewards for ordinary people in their everyday lives: that is, on consumption, leisure and everyday life?¹⁴¹ This was no superficial choice of display modes but a matter of emphasis, meaning and principle.

¹³⁸ Unidentified document translated into Russian from a foreign (presumably Belgian) public relations consultancy, GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 147-78; GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 192.

¹³⁹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 14-15.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, ll. 11-13.

¹⁴¹ Ibid (Ryzhkov); GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 87-124; GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 45-53 (Zakharchenko).

Some of those involved in the planning considered it impossible to represent adequately the achievements of socialism—or the socialist specificity of these achievements—without an emphasis on the material base: on industrial and technological progress. And that meant machines. At a meeting that probably took place before Shepilov was ousted for his association with the ‘anti-party group’ in June 1957, Iakov A. Lomko, head of the Soviet Information Bureau and Deputy to the General Commissar of the Soviet section, with an ideological brief in regard to the planning, gave a Marxist analysis of the arrangement of the pavilion according to the current version of the thematic plan compiled by Ryzhkov’s committee under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce. An introductory section, ‘What is the Soviet Union?’ was followed by a demonstration of the base-heavy industry—after which came the superstructure—science, art, culture, leisure—and the conclusion. ‘In the thematic plan questions of trade and industry are allocated 30-40% and the rest is assigned to our superstructures: culture, art, etc. But surely we can’t do without the base? Comrade Shepilov has said three times that we should not reduce it to the superstructure alone.’¹⁴²

Although Shepilov was removed, the problem remained: how to convey the systemic specificity of progress, to make clear, in ways foreign publics would grasp, the role played by the Revolution, the guiding role of the party and the trajectory towards communism in providing Soviet people with a better life? At meetings held in June 1957, writers, artists and journalists had put forward concrete ideas for how to show what Soviet power had given to the ordinary person, for example, to trace the transformation of a particular village from its impoverished prerevolutionary past to its prosperous present in order to counter the ideological projections of the Western displays. But as Zhukov complained, these were rejected by Ryzhkov’s committee and the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁴³

For Zhukov and his Committee for Cultural Links it was clear: the aim was not an exhibit of the machinery of progress but the contrary, something more like the humanized, soft sell approach the American display would also take, but adapted to sell socialism. In Zhukov’s conceptualization, human individuals, everyday life and

¹⁴² GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 192-3.

¹⁴³ Ibid, l. 28, l. 204.

consumption of the rewards of industrialization were as important as production. He and his colleagues were highly critical of the Chamber of Commerce's initial thematic plan. It repeated past mistakes, they argued, by seeking to perpetuate practices that were now out of step with the priorities of the late 1950s and with the specific context of the Cold War Expo.¹⁴⁴ Zhukov reported to the Central Committee on 20 September 1957 on a mock-up of the Soviet pavilion, which the Directorate for the Soviet section had prepared:

It only confirms my worst fears, which I expressed at a meeting of the Secretariat held to discuss the organization of Soviet propaganda at the Brussels fair. Although comrades from the Ministry of Foreign Trade insisted that they had made significant changes, machines, goods, and things remain, as in the original exhibition plan, in the center of the exposition, and not the Soviet person. [...] Of course we have to show our achievements in industry and agriculture, including showing our best machines, mechanisms, and inventions, but these *must not push people into the background*; on the contrary, they must *illustrate* their creative life. A major part of the hall is dedicated to showing powerful Soviet machine tools, turbines, and six models depict heavy industrial plant in action. [...] A big place is given to Soviet art including ballet and to products of light and food industries. All this is done with great taste and skill and will undoubtedly make a big impression on the viewer. But here, too, the person who benefits from this blessing recedes, once again, into the background.¹⁴⁵

Zhukov's attempts to intervene in the character of the exhibition clearly met with resistance. In September 1957, with only half a year left to save the show, he ran around from one Central Committee Secretary to another trying to get Pospelov, Mikoyan, and Suslov to familiarize themselves with the maquette, make the exhibition organizers listen to him, and avert the danger that the exhibition would be a hackneyed show of machines and piles of products. 'I feel I have to inform you of the concerns that the maquette arouses in us, workers of the Committee for Cultural Links,' he appealed to Mikoyan, reiterating the key precept that, 'Things should not push people into the background.'¹⁴⁶ But among the party secretaries, too, he encountered inertia or unwillingness to give the international exhibition priority in face of more pressing

¹⁴⁴ Ibid ll. 26-29 (Zhukov to CC CPSU). Kuznetsov complained that in the Chamber of Commerce's plan: 'An ordinary person comes, wanting to get to know the USSR, but a large number of stands, statistics, etcetera crowd in on him.' Ibid, l. 193 of 192-203; GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22.

¹⁴⁵ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 26 (Zhukov to CC CPSU).

¹⁴⁶ Zhukov to Mikoian, 20 Sept. 1957: GARF f. 9518, op 1, d. 588, ll. 39-40.

domestic concerns that autumn: preparing for celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Revolution. In increasing desperation as time slipped away, Zhukov wrote to Pospelov again on 21 October 1957: 'Experience shows that comments expressed at a lower level do not receive the necessary support in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, which is involved in preparation for Soviet participation in the exhibition. But time is passing and we could be left in a less advantageous situation at the Brussels exhibition than might be expected.'¹⁴⁷ Suslov eventually found time to respond to Zhukov's increasingly desperate pleas and asked Ryzhkov to read out to the committee a two-page document in which Zhukov laid out his views on how the exhibition should and should not be done. Ryzhkov somewhat grudgingly obeyed, informing the meeting: 'We are supposed to discuss it and keep it in mind at this meeting. When you draw your conclusions take account also of Zhukov's view.'¹⁴⁸ Ryzhkov, responsible for the practical realization of the scenario, dismissed Zhukov's suggestions as impractical, given that a viewer would only have ten to twenty minutes to digest any given section, making it essential to get points across immediately. 'I don't want to be ironic about comrade Zhukov's memo,' he said, but 'what form, for example, is needed in order to show the life story of a director of ... someone who had been a plumber and then became director of factory? How is it possible to show this? You can't present the director in real life, and photos also won't do.'¹⁴⁹

Zhukov also resorted to drafting in reinforcement from prominent public and cultural figures. These included Vasilii Zakharchenko, chief editor of the innovative journal *Tekhnika molodezhi* [*Technology for Young People*], who was seconded to edit

¹⁴⁷ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 36-44 (quotation on l. 44). Zhukov wrote to Pospelov 20 September 1957 concerning a memo where he had set out his views on the maquette: 'M. A. Suslov said he was too busy to travel to see the mock-up of the exposition and asked you if possible to look at it. I fear that without direct intervention of the Central Committee secretary, the Ministry of Foreign Trade will leave this note without results.' (Ibid, l. 36) 'It would be useful if a Central Committee secretary could in the near future visit the model of the Soviet pavilion so that the final decision can be taken. Later it will be difficult to make changes,' he pleaded. (l. 28) Zhukov wrote again to Pospelov on 21 October 1957: 'I know how busy you and other Central Committee secretaries are on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the Revolution, but I feel it is necessary that the Central Committee should voice its opinion concerning the character of the Soviet pavilion. It might be useful to assign leading workers of Section of Culture, Science and Agitation and propaganda to familiarize themselves with the maquette.' (l. 44).

¹⁴⁸ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 217 (report by Ryzhkov to meeting of Consultation Council, 3 October 1957). Zhukov's document is not included in the stenographer's report of the meeting but its content would appear to reflect his analysis and suggestions as cited above.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, ll. 217-18.

the newspaper of the Soviet section at the Brussels fair, *Sputnik*.¹⁵⁰ Zakharchenko reviewed the maquette of the pavilion and found it flawed on similar grounds to Zhukov. As he complained, he had already made his criticisms known to the artists and exhibition designers while viewing the mock-up, but they refused to carry them out, 'seeing them as the random opinion of a person lacking authority. So I have put my views in writing.'¹⁵¹ The main shortcomings he identified were that 'the individual constructor and creator is pushed into the background while in the foreground are the 'faceless' fruits of his labor – machines, mechanisms and construction. The central hall is more like an industrial exhibition of mechanisms than a hymn to the Soviet person.' Zakharchenko called for the plan to be fundamentally revised, such as to:

supplement all sections with lively and sometimes intimately treated biographies of the most varied people of our country. Photo-essays must reveal the true life of the Soviet person. ... It is necessary to show the person—at work, in the family, and in public activity, enjoying themselves, their customs and traditions, in private life—without fearing, against this background of successes and achievements, to reveal the difficulties and sometimes failures. Only then will we be believed!... In the industry section we need to place among the machines a big photo, say, of a steel worker at home with his family, and around him to tell about his productive and personal life – at work, his relations with his parents, at evening school, hunting for pleasure, and in social activity.¹⁵²

He also urged attention to the drama and development of the exposition, through the use of contrast and catharsis: 'By creating such a climactic organization of the pavilion we can make the viewer genuinely feel not only the strength of individual branches of our science and technology but the essence of socialism in the coordination of all these branches to solve one of the most significant problems.'¹⁵³

The mode of address Zakharchenko proposed would not be out of place on Madison Avenue, as Lewis Siegelbaum has observed, and was similar to that adopted in the American pavilion. 'We, the host, must not only 'broadcast,' but also smile, joke, engage in conversation, and not assume the role of a schoolteacher.'¹⁵⁴ Who or what was mediating this transculturation? It is entirely conceivable that Zakharchenko, whose journal *Tekhnika molodezhi* led the way in pioneering new stylish formats and

¹⁵⁰ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 20.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, ll. 45-56 (Zakharchenko's recommendations draft and corrected version), here l. 55;

¹⁵² Ibid, l. 55; also GARF f. 9470, op. 1 d. 11, ll. 172-76; and d. 10, l. 92.

¹⁵³ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 53.

¹⁵⁴ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 172-76; cited by Siegelbaum, 'Representation of Technology,' ms, p. 13.

graphic design, took a close professional interest in contemporary Western magazines, not least *Amerika*, which regularly printed such features as photo essays on an individual worker and his family at home.¹⁵⁵

To some extent the new approach can also be put down to learning from friends. The Soviet Union's satellites played a role in persuading Zhukov and his allies of the importance of placing the individual, biography and daily life, including the family and 'private' life, in the center. Zhukov asked the Czechoslovak Minister of Culture and Schools, Frantisek Kahuda, how the Czechoslovak pavilion would be organized. 'He told me that they consider it essential to place in the foreground the life of an ordinary citizen of Czechoslovakia and not the display of machines. The pavilion itself is organized around a single idea, "One Day in Czechoslovakia".'¹⁵⁶ Using an approach comparable to the 'America, Land and People' theme, to embody the values and identity of a socialist nation personified in concrete individual lives, the Czechoslovak pavilion could be regarded as a kind of intermediary between the American and the Soviet approach: not so much an insulator as a conductor. It also made use of innovative cinematic display techniques such as the 'Polyscreen' (*Polyekran*, consisting of simultaneous slide and film projection onto seven suspended screens of different sizes) which invited comparison, as well as contrast, with the Eames' *Glimpses of the USA* and Disney's Circarama. The success of the Czechoslovak pavilion was taken on board during and after the fair by Soviet exhibition design specialists. They took a keen professional interest in Czechoslovak design techniques, including the use of fantasy and visual magic exemplified in the 'Magic Lantern,' (*Laterna magika*) which combined filmed and live performance.¹⁵⁷ In the planning stages for Brussels, the Soviet

¹⁵⁵ E.g. 'On stroit samolety: U Roberta Forrestera mnogo raboty i khoroshie zarabotki,' *Amerika*, no. 3 (c. 1957): 12-17; 'Sem'ia i dom instrumental'shchika,' *Amerika*, no. 12 (c. 1958): 48-52; 'Molochnaia ferma Charlza Uilkoksa: Semeiny al'bom' *Amerika*, no. 37 (c. 1959): 2-7.

¹⁵⁶ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 44 and 26-29 (Zhukov to Pospelov, 21 Oct. 57).

¹⁵⁷ The following year, in summer 1959, a major exhibition of Czechoslovak glass was invited to Moscow's prestigious Central Exhibition Hall to coincide with and countervail the allure of the glittering consumer paradise presented at the American National Exhibition with the magic of socialist display. As Boris Brodskii's article cited above exemplified, Soviet artists and critics closely studied the display techniques, keen to assimilate the Czechs' successful practices. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) f. 2329, op. 4, d. 1015 (discussion in Moscow Organization of the USSR Artists' Union on Czechoslovak Glass Exhibition, 1959); Central Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow (TsALIM) f. 21, op. 1, dd. 58-60 and 66; Karel Pánský, 'S Vystavky chekhoslovatského skla,' *Sovetskaiia torgovlia*, no. 11 (1959): 40-41; Stanislav Kovarzh (Kovář) 'Chekhoslovatskie vystavki,' *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 12 (1959): 16-24.

organizers were interested in what they could learn about marketing and display from their more 'Western' satellite. Regarding the sale of souvenirs, for example, they realized that what they were planning to offer fell far short of what their Czechoslovak colleagues were proposing, including perfume produced by the chemical industry packaged in gift sets designated for family, for women, and for wedding presents.¹⁵⁸

The new approach was also determined by the West's image of the Soviet Union—or by Soviet assumptions about that image of themselves. Zhukov sought to build defenses against existing and potential anti-Soviet propaganda into the exhibition. He reported to the Central Committee that the U.S. State Department had published a book to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, 'in which, by means of falsified statistics it tries to prove that in 40 years the life of Soviet workers had improved only by 0.02%. American propaganda tricksters declare that a basket with the same selection of products in the USSR now costs the workers as much as in 1913.'¹⁵⁹ To position the ordinary individual in the limelight was also necessitated by Western stereotypes and propaganda. Zhukov's colleague Kuznetsov argued:

Abroad they write that here we have barracks and standardization and that individuality is suppressed. Therefore we need to show somehow that here the individual is ascendant and flourishes. ... In the West they constantly try to prove that under socialism, and even more under communism, the individual is reduced to a faceless number. On the contrary, we need first to show the conditions for the development of the individual and then starting out from showing [individual] people we can then make generalizations.¹⁶⁰

Thus, in order to forestall Western criticism and compete with the USA, the exhibition had to adopt an approach that was in principle ideologically closer to the West: to downplay the collective and the supra-individual historical processes in favor of narratives based on the individual.¹⁶¹ It is here and in regard to the emphasis on

¹⁵⁸ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 196.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, l. 26.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, ll. 192-206. Alloway criticized the Soviet exhibition at Earls Court 1961 on both counts Kuznetsov and Zhukov sought to avoid.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, ll. 2-10 (Memo to authors preparing materials for USSR pavilion c. July 1957), and l. 204: 'It is necessary to design the exhibition as they do it in the West and not like the Agricultural Exhibition.'

consumption and everyday life that I think we can begin to speak of hybridization or creolization of the Soviet self as it was articulated in the contact zone.¹⁶²

Yet once again we find signs of a debilitating and, for Zhukov, highly frustrating difference of bureaucratic cultures and institutionalized approaches between his Committee and the Chamber of Commerce:

I advised the organizers to counter this [Western] slander by laying out the facts, but Nesterov, for example, expressed doubts: 'do we really need to engage in agitation?' The organizers of the exhibition are, I am convinced, in thrall to the established canons of arranging pavilions at international *trade fairs*. They sincerely, wholeheartedly strive to show Soviet goods face to face, but they *don't have the skill or perhaps the will* to show at this exhibition, which is different from all previous ones, the achievements of the Soviet system as these are applied to the needs and demands of the ordinary Soviet person. I should remind you that the official theme of the exhibition is not a show of things, but 'Man and Progress'.¹⁶³



While the Americans had made plain that they would treat the Expo as an ideological battleground, and both the Czechoslovaks and the West European Left, such as Belgium's reformist trade union, had grasped the implications for their own approach (the latter making 'man and socialism' the theme of their Germinal pavilion), the USSR Chamber of Commerce looked set to miss a trick. Zhukov complained: 'In our pavilion Soviet trade unions and their activities are not represented at all.'¹⁶⁴

Boris Leo, "An Objective View," Krokodil, no. 22 (10 August 1959), back cover.

¹⁶² The novelty of this approach needs to be tempered by acknowledgment that after the First Five Year Plan, with the institution of Socialist Realism and rise of personality cults, the collective hero and supra-personal historical forces were displaced by a focus on the supposedly 'typical' individual.

¹⁶³ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 27 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, l. 27.

iv. The Anticipated Viewer

In addition to the windmill of assumptions, rumors and intelligence concerning the American plans, at which Zhukov tilted, another figment loomed large in these discussions and shaped the Soviet display: the imagined Western viewer. He or she and his or her low level of intelligence and culture, were invoked strategically to support Zhukov's syncretic approach, cited, for example, as the reason for needing to place individual people at the center of attention. To reach the Western audience and make a convincing pitch for the benefits of state socialism required palpable demonstration of improvements in ordinary people's daily lives. The Soviet organizers wanted to emphasize the rights and benefits of all citizens of the USSR, for example, but they feared their message could get lost in translation. The transcultural obstacles to getting the message across included the assumed prejudices and false consciousness of the Western viewer, long subjected to anti-Soviet propaganda. Thus, Zhukov wanted to emphasize above all the right to labor, 'But do Western people understand that labor is the main element of happiness?'¹⁶⁵ Viewers would also project their ossified prejudices onto the Soviet display, orientalizing it as backward, the antithesis of Western modernity. Zhukov worried how to represent agriculture and the modernization of the village effectively in this regard: 'It is hard to find a village that would have an effect in the West. It is not enough to say we have ploughed up X number of hectares. For them that's not what is important, they don't care a damn about that. They remember the Russian peasant in bast shoes and a ragged peasant's coat.'¹⁶⁶

The problem of trans-systemic and transcultural communication was not only a matter of the message but also of the medium. The mode of address, the visual language used, the syntax of the display: all had to take account of the foreign viewer's exhibitionary culture, shaped, they assumed, by admass and the phantasmagoria of department stores. The planners recognized that they must accommodate both their viewers' existing culture of looking and the immediate context in which they would perceive the Soviet representation at Brussels, specifically, that they would inevitably compare it to the American pavilion.

¹⁶⁵ GARF f. 9518, op 1, d. 588, l. 204. For that reason it was necessary not only to demonstrate the rights Soviet people possessed, but to show how they lived and 'what Soviet power has given to man.' GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 9, l. 156.

¹⁶⁶ GARF f. 9518, op 1, d. 588, l. 204.

How to appeal to the European viewer, especially the mass viewer? What was his or her visual culture and level of intellect? What would attract and hold his attention and stay in her memory? How to represent the Soviet path to progress through state planning and emphasis on social justice in ways that would be compelling to a Western audience in this context of close coexistence and peaceful competition?

The internalized construction of the alien viewer that underpinned the organizers' concern with animating the exhibition was, to a limited extent, informed by experience, but it was also constituted through difference, as the antithesis of the Soviet ideal self-construction as the 'most reading people', committed to learning and self-improvement. The Soviet planners started out from this assumption of difference: the Western viewer was not like the Soviet one they knew. She or he had different expectations of a day out at the fair and a different culture of exhibition viewing – or more precisely, no culture at all. Ryzhkov told a meeting of the exhibition council in October 1957: 'It is necessary to realize that the public is not as we understand it in the USSR, [where] a *kolkhoz* farmer or worker from a factory will stand by the conveyor belt with a notebook and studies. Ninety or eighty per cent of the visitors, as is known from the experience of other exhibitions, will be citizens who come just to pass time. There might be one or two students looking for answers or to improve their qualifications, but the rest of the visitors will not come looking for further education.'¹⁶⁷ The Western viewer was also 'not like the Chinese, who study every question in detail. Therefore we must have radio, television, give out free literature, so that they take away the impression of superiority of the Soviet order in all areas.'¹⁶⁸ They came not for edification but for entertainment and relaxation, a day out at the fair – precisely the experience the American exhibit in its pleasure dome offered.¹⁶⁹

But how well did the Soviet organizers know the Western mass viewer they sought to reach and to whose interests, attention span, mode of viewing, and visit agendas their exposition had to appeal? Here, the skill gap and institutional inertia that Zhukov lamented were compounded by the Soviet organizers' very limited (although

¹⁶⁷ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 207.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, l. 208.

¹⁶⁹ The identification of the U.S. pavilion as a pleasure dome rather than an exhibition hall is from Bernard Rudofsky as cited by Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 202.

rapidly growing in the fifties) direct contact with ordinary people in the capitalist West. Compared with the Americans, who had already conducted numerous surveys of popular opinion in Europe concerning the reception of their exhibitions and other cultural offensives, Soviet designers were also handicapped by that fact that in the Soviet Union the systematic study of public opinion, suppressed under Stalin, was only beginning to be re-established even for domestic purposes; to conduct such surveys abroad on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain was barely thinkable.¹⁷⁰

The Soviet authorities had some experience of the kind of questions foreigners commonly asked of Soviet representatives. This was based more on readers than on viewers, although they also collected such information through visitors' books at exhibitions. Readers from Britain, including Labor Party members, repeatedly asked about the meaning of 'Soviet democracy and what it does for the person.' For that reason the theme of Soviet democracy 'must find a central place in our propaganda in the medium of the exhibition.'¹⁷¹ The second group of questions they asked concerned the living standards of Soviet people.¹⁷² Thus the paired issues of democracy and living standards had to be addressed by the Soviet exhibit not only because these were the two prongs of the approach expected from America but also because the viewers – including the more sympathetic, left-leaning ones—would demand answers on these issues and it was best to have them ready in advance. This was also a matter of training exhibition staff. As Nesterov warned, visitors would try to catch Soviet personnel out with trick questions such as 'do you believe in God'?' and they must be able to 'show that the Soviet person is in control of the situation. There will be no less than a million Americans – they are coarse people without shame, and they might ask any kind of question.'¹⁷³

In order to overcome this knowledge gap, the Soviet organizers not only took advice from socialist allies and friendship societies, but also learned from the capitalist

¹⁷⁰ Similarly Inturist, while recognizing the need to introduce new practices, had little direct experience or empirical information about the actual tastes and habits of foreign tourists coming to the USSR, on which to base either their advertising or development of their product. Salmon, 'Marketing Socialism,' 186-204. Perhaps in part as a result of seeing its uses in international contexts, the study of Public Opinion was established in 1960 by B. A. Grushin, under the auspices of *Komsomol'skaia pravda*.

¹⁷¹ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 159-62.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 34-45 (quoted passage l. 38).

enemy. Kuznetsov suggested: 'We could invite consultants from Belgium (without signing a contract with them, of course), who know well how to have an effect on the visitor.'¹⁷⁴ This suggestion was evidently acted upon. At a subsequent meeting concerning the thematic plan of the pavilion, Kuznetsov referred to a report from a firm transliterated as 'Pabli Sintez'—seemingly a Belgian public relations consultancy or advertising agency—which 'treats the same questions in a different way, more originally. In the center of attention is the life of the individual, the person's interests. Our own plans look hackneyed.'¹⁷⁵

An unidentified document in the archives, translated from French into Russian, appears to be a report from this or another advertising agency. It reproduced the conventional wisdom of public relations, advising the Soviets, as Siegelbaum has summarized, to 'penetrate into the psychology of your interlocutor and accommodate yourself to it as best you can.'¹⁷⁶ The consultants approached the questions of the exhibition design from two directions: 'the perspective of the Western person who wants to find out; and the perspective of the Soviet person who wants to "defend and show" his country.' Urging the Soviet organizers to take account of different groups of viewers and accommodate their preconceived ideas and likely responses, they categorized viewers first into those who were already interested in the Soviet Union (whether for or against) and those who were indifferent, then further by gender and age, advising also to take account of adolescents and children and attend to family groups.¹⁷⁷ They warned to expect general ignorance: the level of knowledge about Russia among the general masses was stuck in 1913. The exhibition must also address the fact that the Western viewer was given to skepticism rooted in a Cartesian tradition: for him, 'seeing is believing,' therefore visual evidence was essential. The viewer must leave the pavilion 'feeling as if they had been right there in the country.' The exhibition

¹⁷⁴ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, ll. 205-06. It was also proposed to use a Belgian advertising firm to publicize the Soviet pavilion and associated events around Western Europe. GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 30.

¹⁷⁵ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 192 (Kuznetsov presenting the thematic plan of the pavilion, which the general commissar of the Soviet section Ryzhkov and his committee had put together under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce to a meeting concerning preparations for Brussels.)

¹⁷⁶ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 147-78 (report from unidentified foreign consultants translated from French into Russian by N. Dmitrieva, this passage l. 148); Siegelbaum, 'Representation of Technology,' ms, p. 30, note 40.

¹⁷⁷ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 10, l. 154.

should not try to argue but should 'use the style of tourism', and particular attention must be paid to making visitors feel welcome in the pavilion: as in any meeting an easy, unconstrained and personalized manner was vital. The foreign public should be met, metaphorically, with a smile, and 'every visitor must feel that he is being greeted individually', so that on leaving they would feel a pang of homesickness for the Soviet Union and would say 'you feel most at home in the USSR pavilion.'¹⁷⁸ In terms of demonstrating Soviet economic progress, according to the consultants, the exhibition needed to show that 'The brand "Made in the USSR" is able to compete on world markets with international products.'¹⁷⁹

The Belgian consultants said nothing about other divisions among the public: between Catholic and Protestant, for example, or by educational level and class. The latter divisions, unsurprisingly, did concern the Soviet organizers, however. *Which* viewer should they prioritize: middle class professionals and specialists or ordinary lay viewers, the working class? Teachers, academics and other professional opinion makers should be wooed and engaged in conversation, since they could be used to 'cascade' the message further. Professional critics and journalists would also pronounce on the exhibition.¹⁸⁰ The main appeal, however, must be to the working class, such as the Belgian workers who organized their reformist union pavilion to promote socialism.

If British workers employed on the British pavilion in Brussels, as photographed for *Life* magazine by Michael Rougier, exemplified the visual culture of Western workers, then how were the Soviets to hail them? He pictured them enjoying their tea-break in the space of homo-social homeliness away from home that they have created for themselves, their chosen visual culture on the wall above their heads: a row of pin-ups.¹⁸¹ It is doubtful whether any Soviet representative penetrated this workers' sanctuary or fully realized the challenge they faced. To satisfy a thirst for sex and glamour was probably a compromise too far removed from the idiom of Soviet public culture even to be thinkable. The U.S. pavilion, meanwhile, like American advertising

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, ll. 172-3. Recall the unconstrained ease aimed at in the U.S. pavilion.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, ll. 161.

¹⁸⁰ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 34-45 [l. 39]; GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 128, ll. 166-68, ll. 207-08. Viewers would also be split along political lines, some would be sympathetically disposed toward the Soviet Union, some neutral and others hostile.

¹⁸¹ Michael Rougier, photograph, Workers at the British pavilion, at Brussels World's Fair, 1958 March 1958. *Life*, <<http://bit.ly/9PiUVE>>.

and packaging appealed to just this desire for un-edifying relaxation and sex (while stopping short of soft porn), as Cullman admitted: 'It is quite true that too much emphasis from the visitors is spent watching the Vogue models and eating ice cream cones, but I guess sex and gastronomy are here to stay.'¹⁸² At the Soviet trade fair in London three years later, the Soviet display of consumer goods was criticized by Alloway precisely for lacking this allure. 'The possession of consumer goods is not the only blessing and benefit of peace, but it is peace's infallible index,' he wrote. But although the Soviet Union had placeholders for such items it had missed the point of consumer goods: 'the entertainment, the styling that goes with mass produced consumer goods is part of their value and function. The Russians, however, by denying themselves sophistication, just as they eschew advertising, reduced the fruits of peace to an oppressive pile of hardware in a bower of statistics.'¹⁸³ In paying too little attention to the fantasy and magic that resided in styling, advertising and packaging, they merely fulfilled a function, remaining utilitarian things, not objects of desire. The semiotics of consumer goods was still missing. But, if Alloway's criticisms were justified, this does not mean that they were not aspiring in this direction.

Gender, a category proposed by the Belgian consultants, was one that also came naturally (uncritically) to the Soviet organizers, contradicting what should, according to Soviet rhetorical commitment to women's emancipation and equality, have been an important systemic difference. Trying to imagine the European visitor to the Soviet pavilion for the purpose of planning the display, the Soviet authorities from SCCLFC, like their U.S. counterparts, envisaged her in stereotypically female form. According to Kuznetsov, 'The [exhibition] plan must be very clever but also simple and lively. [...] Along comes a housewife wanting to know how a housewife lives in the Soviet Union, what kind of stove she has, how she swaddles a baby – from the point of view of how we live.'¹⁸⁴ It is significant that it was seen as essential in the post-war world to appeal to women in their roles as mothers, wives, homemakers and consumers. The American way of life was also personified in the female form of the pushbutton housewife. Imagining the foreign viewer as female was no feminist gesture on the part of the Soviet

¹⁸² Howard Cullman to Sherman Adams (21 May 1958), cited by Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 144.

¹⁸³ Alloway, 'USSR at Earl's Court,' 45.

¹⁸⁴ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 193.

organizers, intended to empower her in ways that went beyond the stock claims to women's equality under socialism. Rather, this was a matter of envisaging what they saw as the lowest common denominator of rationality and consciousness, in line with the Bolshevik view of women as the least conscious element, most deeply mired in the relations of feudal or capitalist society.

Any pre-existing inclination on the organizers' part to address women was reinforced by the foreign PR consultants. But the expertise on the Western public they offered merely reproduced gender stereotypes, which in spite of forty years of socialism remained as unexamined in Soviet discourse as they were in the West. This was an instance of common ground in patriarchy, rather than convergence, which implies change.¹⁸⁵ Thus, men 'are always interested in politics and international affairs.' The Western male would come to the exhibition with preconceived ideas for which he would seek confirmation. Although the Soviet organizers should offer him material for thought so that he had to review his political convictions from a new perspective there was no point in trying to convert him to a different point of view.¹⁸⁶ While men were a difficult nut to crack, women were identified as a soft touch, ignorant but 'curious ... and often driven by simple instinct'. They would pay more attention to the life of the Soviet person, while ignoring statistics about the growth of industry and trade. 'Lovers of piquant detail, women will want to know about the life of women in the USSR. The housewife is bound to take an interest in how the housewife lives in the USSR.' Once their curiosity was aroused they would want to exchange opinions. 'It is desirable therefore to make use of these aspects of [women's] character with the aim of winning their sympathy because in many cases they have substantial influence over men.'¹⁸⁷ Women, then, were the primary target audience. It was important to reach them, and through them to reach men.

Zhukov and Kuznetsov's statements indicate that they took this advice on board, or that it confirmed their own instinct, conforming as it did to the stereotypes of women still prevalent in Soviet discourse. In feminizing the Western viewer, the Soviet exhibition organizers also infantilized her, assuming a lower level of conceptual and

¹⁸⁵ For fuller argumentation see Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen,' 211-52.

¹⁸⁶ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 147-50.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

analytical perception than Soviet audiences. The image of the viewer they internalized assumed a minimal level of intellectual engagement and effort, a low boredom threshold, and an almost childish need to be entertained. The corollary was a greater reliance on the senses—sight and touch—rather than abstract thought, on entertaining devices to grab and hold their attention, and on pleasure. A drop of information had to be ministered with a spoonful of sugar. 'Foreign readers don't like to read a lot or for long. [...] We love agitation but the foreign reader won't tolerate it. Therefore our brochure must be short and, in light of what the foreign reader is used to, we must attend to such media as cinema, television, posters – that which gives pleasure and from which they can obtain a dose of positive information about the Soviet Union.'¹⁸⁸ According to Zhukov, 'Western people are used to maximum visual aids [*nagliadnosti*]. It is very hard to get to them with abstractions.'¹⁸⁹ Kuznetsov added, 'In the West their thinking about generalization is primitive. They love to feel and look. This aspect has to be kept in mind.'¹⁹⁰ This determined a different mode of display from that which was customary back home: it had to be dynamic, entertaining and amusing. 'Everything must turn, move, wink, catch the eye,' said Zhukov.¹⁹¹ Working models were vital to animate the displays.¹⁹² Whatever, as Ryzhkov urged, 'the display must be precise, engaging, not boring, so that when a person has been in our pavilion he will involuntarily feel what is Soviet power, the Soviet land, whether he wants to or not.'¹⁹³ Above all, opined Kuznetsov, 'Visitors to the exhibition should not receive some kind of seminar at it.'¹⁹⁴ Direct propaganda had to be avoided at all costs because it was likely to backfire.¹⁹⁵

The appeal to the Western viewer required a more entertaining approach, avoiding didacticism, and making the displays as visual, immediate and dynamic as

¹⁸⁸ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 168. The emphasis on entertainment rather than edification characterized the American approach to exhibitions even of science. A planning document of the U.S. National Science Planning Board concerning plans for the Century 21 exposition in Seattle, filed among the Soviet planning papers for Brussels, called for a 'spectacular, popular, appealing central theme which everybody will want to see... The educational aspect... must be subordinated to that of entertainment.' GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 1, l. 128.

¹⁸⁹ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 205.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, ll. 205-6.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, l. 207.

¹⁹² GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 22, l. 38 (Nesterov); d. 21, l. 207 (Ryzhkov).

¹⁹³ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 207.

¹⁹⁴ GARF f. 9518, op. 1, d. 588, l. 207.

¹⁹⁵ GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 21, l. 161.

possible. Influenced or at least bolstered by Western advertising and publicity experts, and by what was known about the American approach, and taking on board the Western other's image of the Soviet Union, Zhukov and his allies identified an approach that focuses on the particular, on the benefits of socialism as they are felt by the individual rather than by the collective. A human touch must be found that would allow the viewer to empathize and comprehend the transformations effected by socialism, taking the happy life of the individual ordinary Soviet person as the central theme. Above all, it was necessary to make the big abstract promises concrete, just as the Americans did: to humanize the theme by showing the individual and his or her everyday life, and to find ways to enable the viewer to imagine progress through the fate of an individual and successive generations.

Conclusion

Between the chimera-America and the yahoo-viewer, the Soviet self-image was constructed and presented to the world. The juxtaposition of America and the Soviet Union may not have resulted in the reconciliation, on the West's terms, the Belgian hosts had hoped to engineer. It did, however, make dialogue and intertextuality unavoidable, serving as a contact zone where new hybrid identities and modes of communication were forged in the process of transculturation. Regarding the American experience in this period, Rydell notes that packaging itself for Europe 'accelerated the process of modernizing America and reconfiguring the culture of imperial abundance into the molten core of a value system that would define postwar America.' The process of representing itself to Europe changed America.¹⁹⁶ The Soviet Union, I argue, experienced something similar. In seeking to anticipate and forestall American competition and at the same time to accommodate the imagined viewer, it adapted its own practices and shaped for itself an identity and image of socialist modernity that was distinct from Stalinism and less foreign to the West.

The image which both the USA and USSR projected to the world at Brussels was influenced by multiple factors: by domestic politics and international agendas, by budget allocations and resource priorities, as well as by the common directives of the

¹⁹⁶ Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 211.

Expo that were set by the Belgian hosts and mandatory for all participants. But it was also shaped to an important extent by knowledge, rumors or assumptions about what positive image the other would try to convey of themselves, as well as by the need to polemicize with and counter-propagandize the bad press the other would (they assumed) try to disseminate about them. For identity is not formed in isolation; subjects are mutually constituted in and by their relations to each other, in dialogue and mutual reflection.

This identity was constructed not only in terms of *difference* but also of competition for the same prizes. Both sides appropriated and tried to lay superior claim to the same Enlightenment values considered likely to appeal to the primarily European but also wider world audience: progress, modernity, democracy, humanism, happiness, and equality.¹⁹⁷ The Soviet representation of its 'self' was constituted both through the internalization of the imagined other, and by syncretic selective assimilation of the other's symbolic language. The main thing for the Soviet self-presentation at Brussels was to communicate its message. But in order to be 'read' it had to make itself readable to an international public, and that required accommodation with its idiom, formatting itself in ways that were compatible and sufficiently familiar to the viewer for them to decode.¹⁹⁸ The result, in the contact zone Brussels represented, was transculturation, syncretism, the hybridization of the Soviet representation of its socialist modernity.

Brussels, as an early endeavor in this direction, was flawed and compromised, but the popularity of the Soviet pavilion in 1958 would suggest that its efforts to communicate succeeded at least to some extent, even if professional critics such as Alloway failed to recognize the Soviet Union's new image and still criticized the Soviet displays for doing just what Zhukov sought to avoid: dwarfing and bombarding the viewer with things and reducing the individual to a statistic. Nevertheless the experience of communicating in the contact zone, I would argue, had a lasting impact on Soviet image culture and, indeed, identity.

Did, then, the adoption of elements of the West's iconography of modernity—consumption and benefits as experienced in individual lives and private life—imply

¹⁹⁷ Cauter, *The Dancer Defects*.

¹⁹⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.

adoption of its value system? Did transculturation facilitate the erosion of difference, and did the accommodation of the West's benchmarks of success lead to a loss of systemic identity? To answer more conclusively these larger questions, which the present study raises, requires further investigation concerning the subsequent effects of Brussels '58 and the diachronic development of processes set in train there. What is clear is that, at the time, Soviet participation in the World Fair did not represent any weakening of the commitment to an alternative modernity. Even as Zakharchenko propounded methods of publicity familiar to the West, the aim was to reveal the 'socialist essence,' to emphasize the systemic specificity of socialist planning and organization of production, science and technology, distribution, welfare and collective consumption. If aspects of the West's technology, display techniques and iconography were 'critically assimilated,' then it was to strengthen the persuasive power of socialism. The exhibition at Brussels, as Zhukov and his allies would have it, was international or even Western in form, but it was still socialist in content.